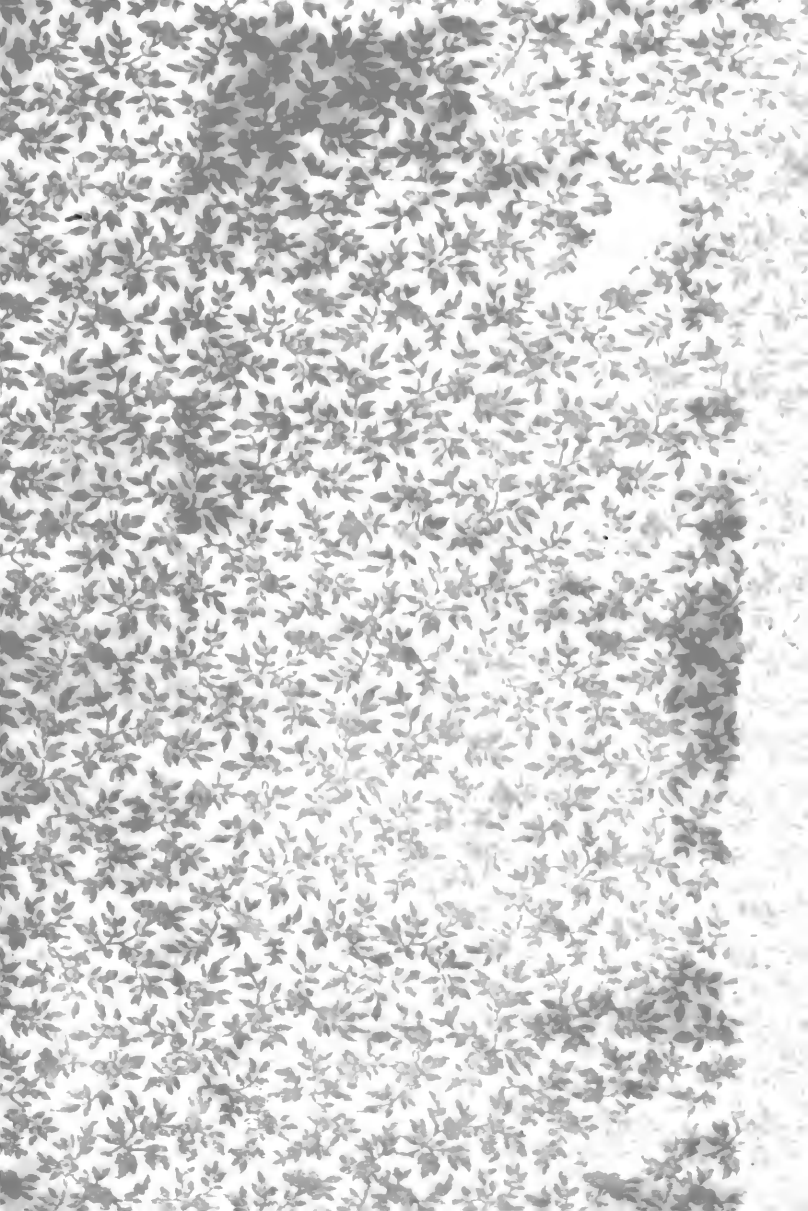






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THE TRAGEDY OF FEATHERSTONE.

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THE
TRAGEDY OF FEATHERSTONE.

BY
B. L. FARJEON.

AUTHOR OF

"MISER FAREBROTHER," "A SECRET INHERITANCE," "GREAT PORTER SQUARE," ETC.

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CONTENTS.

PART THE FIRST.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. MORNING IN COBHAM WOODS	1
II. MICHAEL FEATHERSTONE'S SINGULAR PROCEEDINGS ...	11
III. JAMES WHITELOCK'S CONFESSION	15
IV. A POOR BOY'S PHILOSOPHY	22
V. HOME, SWEET HOME	28
VI. PRINCE PENNYFOLD	31
VII. A SCHOOL TREAT	34
VIII. THE PLAIN AND BITTER TRUTH	42
IX. A GOOD WOMAN'S LOVE	51
X. A SURPRISING ADVENTURE	59
XI. TOMMY MAYPLE GETS INTO DISGRACE	67
XII. THE STOLEN TREASURE	76
XIII. DREAMS	80

PART THE SECOND.

I. MICHAEL FEATHERSTONE, THE PROSPEROUS SPECULATOR	82
II. HARD TIMES	87
III. THE TRAGEDY OF FEATHERSTONE	95
IV. A VISION OF THE FUTURE	104
V. A SAD PARTING	108
VI. ANOTHER VISIT FROM THE DETECTIVE	114

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Contents.

CHAP.	PAGE
VII. MARY'S DESPAIR	119
VIII. THE VISION IN THE NIGHT	121
IX. THE MAD TOY-SELLER	129
X. THE VISIT TO THE DOCTOR	134
XI. MARY RECEIVES A LETTER FROM THE PHYSICIAN ...	143
XII. PETER LAMB.—HOME AGAIN	148
XII. MR. PENNYFOLD, ALDERMAN AND MAGISTRATE ...	152
XIV. FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH ...	160
XV. PETER LAMB MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THRIFTY MILLER	168
XVI. PETER LAMB OBTAINS A REPUTATION FOR ECCEN- TRICITY	175
XVII. WINTER	187
XVIII. FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH ...	193
XIX. A DESERTION AND A MEETING	199
XX. PETER LAMB FINDS THE CONNECTING LINK IN A DREAM	204
XXI. FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH ...	210
XXII. BLIND	220
XXIII. FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH ...	225
XXIV. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY	226
XXV. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (<i>continued</i>)	237
XXVI. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (<i>continued</i>)	243
XXVII. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (<i>continued</i>)	247
XXVIII. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (<i>continued</i>)	251
XXIX. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (<i>continued</i>)	260
XXX. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (<i>continued</i>)	265
XXXI. PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (<i>continued</i>)	271
XXXII. DR. HOWARD GIVES HIS OPINION	278
XXXIII. THOMAS MAYPLE HEARS SOME UNPLEASANT THINGS ...	281
XXXIV. THOMAS MAYPLE'S LEGACY	287

Contents.

CHAP.	PAGE
XXXV. MASTER AND MAN	292
XXXVI. THE USE THAT THOMAS MAYPLE MADE OF HIS SHADOWY LEGACY	300
XXXVII. EDWIN BOUSFIELD PAYS PHILIP RAVEN A VISIT ...	315
XXXVIII. FOLLOWING THE TRAIL	324
XXXIX. A DELICATE AND DIFFICULT TASK	329
XL. FROM EDWIN BOUSFIELD TO PHILIP RAVEN ...	335
XLI. AN EXTRACT FROM MICHAEL FEATHERSTONE'S PRI- VATE BOOK	339
XLII. EDWIN BOUSFIELD CONTINUES HIS LETTER TO PHILIP RAVEN	341
XLIII. "IT IS FOR EVER SUMMER"	349

THE TRAGEDY OF FEATHERSTONE.

PART THE FIRST.

ONE DAY AND ONE NIGHT.

“Come like shadows, so depart.”

CHAPTER I.

MORNING IN COBHAM WOODS.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago there passed through Cobham Woods, within the space of one day and one night, many of the persons whose characters will be portrayed in these pages. Some I hope you will grow to love, and as to others who may not win your hearts, I warn you not to be too hasty to condemn. Unhappily there are souls which, from their first awakening, are overweighted with sins of human inheritance.

The morning commenced with a grand song of thanksgiving, the initial signs of which were manifest just as the distant tree-tops and the breasts of distant heights were joyously quivering beneath the faint, sweet kisses of light which heralded the rising of the sun.

Not all songs are audible ; the most profound are those which are sung silently in the heart. Here, also, mute symbols of gratefulness mingled with the vocal notes which winged creatures were singing. Upland and lowland in Kent are fair as earth can show, and its gardens are beautiful and bountiful. The sensitive air which travelled over field and forest joined in the universal song of thanksgiving. The flowers with their diamonded eyes, and the dew-gemmed blades of grass ; the fragrance of the hedges ; the ivory-sandalled water-lilies which

rose to the bosom of the silver-ponds ; the beetles with their enamelled rainbow coats ; the wondrous beauty of the bits of moss which clung to the roots of trees, and of the spreading growths which lay like a velvet carpet on the glades ; the exquisite shades of green which stretched over hill and plain ; the shining rills and streams : these, and a myriad other marvellous evidences born of the visible and invisible world, were parts of the grand hymn which Nature—whose temple and workshop are one—on this gracious morning was singing in praise of the great Creator. The audible portion of this pæan of gladness may be likened to the body, the mute portion to the soul ; and its sweetness and its glory formed a perfect and incomparable whole.

Higher rose the sun, and the daily toil of humanity began. Doors and windows were opened, and the morning meal prepared and eaten ; labourers wended their way to the fields ; tradesmen took down their shutters ; the clang of hammer and anvil was heard in the forge ; ladders and baskets were carried to the orchards ; farmers anxiously inspected their growing crops. Tramps who had slept in the open air sauntered through the narrow village street, hungering for breakfast. Here a gloomy-eyed man in rags, with shaggy hair and a fortnight's beard on his face, lingered at the door of an ale-house ; here, a woe-worn woman, with a baby in her arms and five little children tugging at her torn gown, trudged desperately onwards. Bits of social history these—familiar pictures to be seen to-day in all parts of the country.

Following the tramps, by the time their forms in the dim distance had reached the vanishing-point, came one who was neither tramp nor village labourer. By his gait and clothes a sailor ; five feet seven in height, of stout build, a fringe of brown beard round his cheerful, sun-burnt face ; age thirty, or thereabouts ; bringing with him a taste of salt seas ; a wanderer just returned home. He carried in his hands a deal box about eighteen inches square, labelled, on the surface he held uppermost, "Glass ; this side up, with care."

His eyes were wistful as he gazed on familiar landmarks which he had not seen for fifteen years. For such as he there is a spirit in stones. That no one knew him evidently troubled him, and it was some time before he found courage to speak. In silence he passed through the narrow street, recognising now

and again a man or a woman whom he had left as such, and searching in vain for a form he yearned to meet. The children were strange to him, having been born in his absence, and some youngish grown-up persons were strange to him, the change in them was so great. He sauntered to and fro in front of one of the poorest of the cottages, at the door of which he did not dare to knock, and at length he halted before it, and watched for the appearance of a dear face at the latticed window. Pots of geraniums were in the windows, as of old, and there was a pregnant beauty in the flowers which he had never recognised in the days of his boyhood. They were the same geraniums he was familiar with fifteen years ago—he was sure of that—and the door of the cottage, and its walls and windows, were the same; it was only the people who were changed.

He was watching for his mother's face.

How was it that since his birth he had never loved her as he did during these moments of dread expectation? Had long absence taught him the value of a mother's love, or was it because she for whom he watched and waited was the only human link which bound him to his species? Without her he was alone in the world, kinless and kithless. What greater desolation than that? Like day without sunshine, like night without stars.

A little maid upon whom eight happy summers had shone stopped and raised her eyes to his weather-beaten face. He, in his turn, looked down at her, and a smile of wonder and delight made his pleasant mouth pleasanter. He laid his large hand upon her shoulder, and she did not shrink from him. Children have an instinctive recognition of kindly natures.

"Why, my lass," he said, stooping to her height, "if your name's not Bessie, mine ain't Peter Lamb."

She nodded and smiled, and gave a little shy movement of her shoulders, which, in its recalling of old reminiscences, deepened his delight.

"It is Bessie," he said,—“ch, my lass?”

"Yes, sir, if you please," replied the child.

"Bessie Patmore—my little wife that was to be?"

In this remark two propositions were involved, and she first answered the one most agreeable to her.

"Yes, sir, if you please, when I'm big enough."

"Ay, ay, my lass," said Peter Lamb, contemplating her with

great interest, "when you're big enough. I had an idea you would be by this time."

Then the child answered proposition number one in his previous remark.

"But, if you please, sir, I'm Bessie Wrench."

"It ain't possible. Wrench!" he exclaimed, a light breaking upon him. "Now I look at you, I see you've got his nose on your face—a pug!" The child put up her hand fearsomely and felt her nose. "What!" continued Peter Lamb; "Wrench, the butcher's boy?"

"My father's a man," said the child proudly, "and mother keeps a shop."

"Where is it?"

"There."

She pointed a few yards off, on the other side of the road.

It was a dingy, shame-faced window, the only one on the ground-floor of a very small house, in which were displayed half-a-dozen sticks of peppermint, a bottle of acid-drops, a bottle of sugar-balls of an exceptionally sticky nature, a dish of fly-blown ginger-cakes, three tops, a saucerful of marbles—"commoners"—a kite which would not hold the wind, a broken toy-windmill, and a penny picture-book of "Jack the Giant Killer," in the open pages of which the double-headed Giant and Jack were depicted as beings suffering from a violent attack of inflammation in their faces, eyes, and hair. Peter Lamb had barely time to master the details of this imposing display of merchandise before a woman appeared at the door, and beckoned to Bessie, with maternal authority expressed in the crook of her forefinger.

"Bessie!" cried the woman, "come and have your face washed. You ought to be at school."

"Stop a minute," said Peter Lamb, as the child was about to spring away. "Is that your mother?"

"Yes, sir." And the child ran off.

"Wrench!" muttered Peter Lamb; "it *is* a wrench!"

He did not smile at the small witticism; there was in it too deep a touch of pathos. He walked straight up to the woman, who still stood at the door of the cottage, and addressed her.

"I was talking to your little lass, and I guessed her name the moment I saw her. I wonder"—he paused, as though the words stuck in his throat—"I wonder if you could guess mine."

She looked at him closely.

"No," she said, "I am sure I couldn't."

Then she passed into the house with her child, and closed the door upon him.

"Ah," he said, when he found himself alone, "left out in the cold." A remark which, taken in its literal sense, was inaccurate, for a hot sun was blazing upon him.

During the course of this episode he had not entirely withdrawn his observation from the cottage whose latticed window he was watching when Bessie introduced herself to him. He resumed his watch, but saw no sign of life within.

An old man, with arched back, slowly approached him.

"Why, as certain as I live," said Peter Lamb, "it's old Ben!"

The old man paused, hearing his name.

"Yes, yes, it's me. Everybody knows old Ben. I'm an institootion in these parts, the vicar says, and 'tis so agreed. It makes no difference to old Ben what they call him—only it ought to be paid for. What may you be looking for, stranger? The road to Strood?"

"No," said Peter Lamb; "I should be able to find my way to Strood without finger-posts, unless the roads, like everything else, have grown out of knowledge."

"Nothing's growed out of knowledge in my reckoning," retorted old Ben resentfully. "Mayhap you know more about these parts than I do, or mayhap"—this with a fine sarcasm—"you'd like to tell me something about 'em that I've forgotten. Try, now, try. It'd be a good joke."

"I ain't going to try, Ben. It would be a liberty for a stranger to take."

"Ah, it would," said old Ben, his hand closing secretly upon a shilling which Peter Lamb had furtively pressed into it. "Well, well, we'll say no more about it. A liberal heart stands for much. If you don't want the road to Strood, mayhap you want something else. Think of something; don't be afraid. Try, now, try. Asking's an open box. The worst part of me's the outside."

"Look at me," said Peter Lamb.

"Ah, I can," said old Ben, with a side-twist of his head, a motion necessary for the raising of it, his back being curved beyond earthly recovery, "and I can see you too, old as I be. I can see a mile. Yes, yes; my sight's good, and my hearing's

good, but my taste's a bit weakish. It's gone off, but it'll come again, mayhap, next year or so. It wants tempting, like the first woman, and I'll tempt it, I promise you!" closing his horny fist tightly on the shilling.

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"Never—never—never," said the old man, with a longer dwelling upon each repetition of the word. "Old Ben never forgets a face of man or child."

"Tell me, then," said Peter Lamb, and his lips trembled, "who lives in that cottage?"

"In that 'un? Who else but Mrs. Parfitt?"

Peter Lamb staggered.

"What name did you say?"

"Mrs. Parfitt. Acquainted with her, mayhap—a relation?"

"No," said Peter Lamb. His lips had grown white now, and something of the ruddy colour had gone out of his face.

"Oh—thought you might be. Seeing as you're no connection, I don't mind telling of you that Mrs. Parfitt's a closish woman. Turns a ha'penny over three-and-thirty times afore she parts with it, and then, believe old Ben, it's like parting with a drop of blood."

"How long has she lived in that cottage?"

"Let me see. There was such a blight among the hops the year she went in as was never known in the memory of morchel man. It was the death of old Phillips the hop-grower. He was eighty-seven, and the worry of the year and the insecks fairly made an end of him. He faded away like a flower, and owed me five silver sixpences for weeding. I've reason to remember old Phillips. Again and again, when my taste was growing weak and wanted treating badly, have I prayed that he'd drop them five sixpences from the heavenly spheres. Then come two good years, to make up for the bad 'un. Then two more bad 'uns, so that growers shouldn't grow proud. Then one middlingish. Then a good 'un. Then a bad 'un again. And this year in, that's going to grieve many a grower, makes nine. That's the sum-total. Nine years ago 'twas that Mrs. Parfitt took possession of that cottage."

The old man counted the years upon his fingers, and now, as Peter Lamb did not immediately speak, he went over the tips again, and gleefully muttered :

"Always good at sums—always good at sums!"

With the same kind of click in his throat as he experienced when he asked little Bessie's mother whether she could guess his name, Peter Lamb said :

"Didn't a Mrs. Lamb live there once?"

"Ah, that she did," replied old Ben; "lived there many a long year."

"What has become of her? Why did she leave?"

"Oh," said old Ben, putting his hand in his pocket to make sure that his rheumatic bean was safe, "she's moved."

Peter Lamb turned with a cry of happiness :

"Moved! Where to?"

"I'll show you if you come along o' me. Walk slow, walk slow—'tis best for health. I mind the time I used to gallop and squander my substance. We old 'uns can learn you young 'uns something. Waste no breath—that's one thing. Waste no words—that's another. Come straight to the point, as we're coming now—that's another."

"You knew the Lambs?—but that's a foolish question to ask."

"It is that. Me that knows every man, woman, and child born in these parts for the last seventy year! Knew 'em? Oh yes, I knew 'em. There was only two of 'em. 'Tis in my mind that Fortress Lamb—a Hoo man was Fortress—died twelve months arter him and his woman was wed. So there was two left, the widder and the babe."

"That was Peter."

"True 'tis. That was Peter; a wild lad; no holding of 'un; up to all sorts of tricks from morn till eve. Not bad at bottom, mayhap, but the top of him was wayward froth; wanted skimming. Well, well, time 'd do that for him." Old Ben paused here to indulge in a noiseless laugh. "His mother fairly worshipped the boy. 'Tis the way of women, if you've had experience, 'specially of mothers, and he give her many a heartache. 'Tis to be pitied she was. A hard life she had of it, not being blessed with worldly possessions; but she's better off now."

"That's a good hearing," said Peter Lamb heartily.

"Yes, yes, better off she is, a deal better off," said old Ben.

"This wild lad of hers," said Peter Lamb, "ran away and went to sea."

"He did, and was drowned four years after."

"Who said so?" cried Peter Lamb in a startled tone.

"Everybody. The news was brought to the village here, and was undisputable. Drowned in the Indian Ocean. 'Twas a judgment on him, mayhap. The widder she took on terrible, went about, dazed like, for weeks and weeks, looking for her wayward boy. Slowly, slowly now! Give me your arm."

In fear and trembling, with dim eyes and a sinking heart Peter Lamb gave old Ben his arm, and assisted him up the broken and irregular flight of steps that led to the village churchyard.

"Is this the road?" asked Peter Lamb in a hushed voice.

"Yes, this is the road. These steps get hillier and hillier. If they go on in this way for another ten year there'll be no mounting of 'em. I'll not do it, that's flat; I'll go round the back way."

Not a word spoke Peter Lamb as old Ben, clinging to him to recover his breath, tottered round and about the paths that divided the graves; not a word did he utter when the old man, attempting in vain to straighten his back, pointed with his stick to a little mound of earth, and said:

"That's where she's moved to."

Peter Lamb knelt by the sacred mound, and covered his face with his hands, while old Ben slowly walked off to tempt his taste at the ale-house with a twelfth part of the shilling the sailor had given him.

Mourn for the dead, son returned too late, and for the careless hours of the past. It is fit you should. The dear, labour-worn face whose eyes used to glisten with a holy joy as you slept in the humble bed at home, shall never again press itself to yours on earth. The loving heart that beat for you alone, the hands that toiled for you, and deemed no work too mean that brought you bread, are changing to the dust from which they sprung. Learn now the true worth of love—too commonly slighted in the present, to be mourned in the future. How often on distant seas, becalmed in the tropics or battling with the storm, have you thought of the poor mother with tender regret, and promised yourself that you would one day suddenly present yourself to her, and give her a glad surprise which would fill her heart with joy! It was not to be. The meeting of soul with soul will take place in God's own good time. Your

work is not accomplished ; you have yet many years to live. Till then, she waits for you at the gates.

Long before this, happy children had trooped to the village school. The youngsters were inwardly jubilant, and could scarcely restrain outward demonstration of their feelings, for it was the half-holiday of the week. Lessons were carelessly done by the pupils, and grave faults condoned by the schoolmaster. True, it was drowsy weather, for it was eleven o'clock, and the hot sun was growing hotter and hotter ; but I am afraid it was the custom of the age for schoolmasters and schoolmistresses to be somewhat lax in the performance of their duties. In those days it was much the fashion for learning to be picked up in a vagrant kind of way. It is very different now. There has come into existence a certain exacting overlooker—shall I hazily describe it as the Public Eye?—which will allow of no backsliding.

But, truth to tell, there was a fair excuse for the master of the village school. He was very young, being barely twenty-two, and utterly unfitted for the position he occupied. One of those squares pegs in round holes we meet with every day of our lives. In this respect, also, he was not at all to blame. Coming to the village three months ago, he learnt that the schoolmaster was so seriously ill that he had been compelled suddenly to relinquish his duties. Having nothing to do, and being desirous to remain in the locality awhile, Warren Earnshaw consented to fill the absent schoolmaster's place till he was well enough to resume his labours. Not only was he perplexed and worried by the strangeness of his new position, but his soul was wrung with love and worldly trouble.

The buzzing of the bees distracted him—to say nothing of a pair of beautiful blue eyes, and a mouth most bewitching and a form most lovely, the complete vision of which (being in his brain and in his heart) appeared in the air whichever way he turned, and obscured the actual presentment of the bodies of his pupils. With this young man, and with Peter Lamb, whom we left in the churchyard, sorrowing over his mother's grave, we shall have to do. And much shall we hear and know of the possessor of the blue eyes and the bewitching month.

Sweet Mary Graham ! I might be pardoned for falling in love with you myself, and so might any man whose passions are purified by innocent thought. It is your spring, maiden, and

your joyous spirit and chaste heart are an added beauty to the woods. Ay, lean idly against this ancient tree, and let your white hand rest upon the brown knotted bark as you gaze at the floating clouds. Dream and be happy while the sun shines—for night is coming.

It is no falsely-manufactured romance I am about to relate. Stories of human lives, and of the trials and temptations of human souls, are valueless unless they have in them the elements of truth and reality; and where, in greater abundance, shall these trials and temptations be found than in London, the City of Startling Contrasts, where luxury mocks starvation and diamonds shine in the eyes of misery? No need to seek for startling episodes when the book of the soul is open to our gaze.

In strangeness and unlikeness of the future to the present, the wildest efforts of the imagination could not transcend the story of the lives of Mary Graham and her lover, Warren Earnshaw, tragically linked as it is with that of a man who, as Mary leant against the ancient tree, passed her without observing her—his mind, also, being occupied by dreams.

CHAPTER II.

MICHAEL FEATHERSTONE'S SINGULAR PROCEEDINGS.

THIS man's name was Michael Featherstone. He arrived in Rochester early yesterday morning, having travelled thither from London, and after a frugal breakfast at a cheap eating-house, inquired of one man the road to Cobham, and of another the road to Chatham. He walked about two-thirds of the way to Cobham, through hop-gardens which, if old Ben was right, were going to grieve many a grower, and then, after other inquiries relating to the road, abruptly retraced his steps, and walked resolutely to Chatham, with the air of a man who had important business to transact in that bustling town. It was a pretence; he did no business in Chatham; he simply made a show of walking briskly about the streets. In the evening he returned to Rochester, and slept there during the night, and this morning walked through Cobham woods and park to the village. Herein I seem to see the finger of Providence; for had not Michael Featherstone abruptly retraced his steps yesterday, and had he then straightforwardly carried out whatever purpose was in his mind, strange issues would have been averted in connection with Peter Lamb and the young school-master, Warren Earnshaw. Upon such slight threads do our destinies hang that the most trivial action of an utter stranger may transform a comedy into a tragedy, and change the whole current of our lives.

In a certain part of the woods, a couple of hundred yards on the Rochester side of an unusually high foot-bridge or stile, easy access to which was provided by a substantial ladder on each side, the movements of Michael Featherstone became singular, not to say mysterious. When he arrived at the foot of the lofty foot-bridge, he did not cross it, but setting his face to Rochester counted two hundred steps thitherwards, and paused, with a feeling of satisfaction that he had not been observed. On this spot, to the right of him, among the grand old trees of oak and elm and chestnut, which thereabouts were

thickly clustered, stood one with peculiarities so marked that it could not be mistaken by any person who, for sufficient reason, had occasion to take note of it. The branches spread out for a great distance around, and the ends of many were buried in the earth, so as to form a kind of arch, beneath which a man could lie with ease, and be partly sheltered. Last year's fallen leaves lay inches thick upon this natural bed.

This huge tree immediately arrested Michael Featherstone's attention ; but before devoting himself to a more serious contemplation of it he looked around with an apparently careless eye. No person was in sight ; he was alone. Then the character of his gaze became truthful, in so far as it was earnest and searching, although its real purport was not disclosed. Indeed, that could scarcely have been rendered intelligible to an uninformed mind without words or further action. He stepped close to the tree, and counted the curved branches, of which there were eleven, and stood quite still for several minutes, and might have so stood for several more, had he not been disturbed by the sound of approaching footsteps. Why so simple a thing should have alarmed him was not evident ; but alarmed he certainly was. With a swift motion he slipped within the arch of boughs, and, throwing himself upon the ground, shaded his face with his arm, and pretended to sleep. He did not venture to open his eyes till he felt assured that he was alone again, and even then he raised the lids warily, to make sure that a watch had not been set upon him. He did not rise immediately ; he lay "a-thynkyng." Put into intelligible shape, his thoughts ran thus :

"It is the spot, from the description. Two hundred yards from the foot-bridge, he said, and wrote on the paper I have in my pocket, partly from his own words, partly at my dictation. It protects me, in case of a mischance, and criminales him. But there shall be no mischance ; all that is needed on my part is caution, and it shall be exercised. Two hundred yards from the foot-bridge, and each of my footsteps measures exactly one yard, to the thousandth part of an inch. The foot-bridge cannot be mistaken : I am lying under it now. The exact number of branches bending over—eleven. I have never seen another tree like it, here or elsewhere. The description is perfect. If the letters are in the bark, which he said he cut there, nothing more can be done till night. I must not be seen

loitering about the spot; it might excite suspicion. A dark night; no moon. It is hardly possible anyone will be in the woods. I shall be safe, quite safe, and if he has not deceived me I shall be made for life."

These three words had a kind of fascination for the thinker, and remained in his mind. "Made for life—made for life—made for life! I shall be rich—rich—rich! I always knew I should be one day; I was always certain that a bit of good luck would fall to my share. And it has, though I should never have guessed the way of it. Ha, ha, Michael Featherstone, made for life—made for life—made for life!" Exultantly as these thoughts ran through his mind, it would have created no agreeable impression to have heard them expressed in equivalent tones.

After awhile he rose from his recumbent posture, and in silence and solitude examined the bark of the tree, at a height of about four feet from the ground. Eyes and fingers were busily engaged in the mysterious search, which at first seemed likely to go unrewarded; but suddenly his eyes flashed with triumph; he had found what he was seeking—the letters W E cut deep in the bark.

It was enough. With throbbing brain he stepped out of the arch of boughs, and set his face towards Cobham.

He reached the lofty bridge which divided wood from park, and crossed it. Then he breathed more freely. "Quite safe," he murmured, "quite safe. Made for life—made for life—made for life!"

But Michael Featherstone, if you are about to be made for life at the expense of another man's honour, of another man's good name, of another man's happiness, your worldly prosperity may be the undoing of you.

No such fear disturbed him. In his excitement and exultation he picked up a stone and threw it at a fawn which had lagged behind the herd of deer to which it belonged. The act was cruel, the aim was good; the stone struck the fawn, which, wounded, cast timid, mournful glances around, and then limped after its fellows. Michael Featherstone smiled, and in that smile his true nature was portrayed.

He was a tall, thin man, respectably dressed, and the expression of his features was habitually composed and grave. At such times he would not have impressed you unfavourably;

but when he was excited or pleased you would have thought twice as to his character. Malicious sparkles gleamed in his eyes, his nostrils twitched, a mocking smile hovered about his lips. Then it was that he was compelled, as it were, to hold out a danger-flag, warning you to be on your guard. As a rule I do not believe in faces. I have seen very benevolent-visaged criminals and very evil-looking good men ; but here assuredly was a face which at times reflected what lay hid behind the mask.

Michael Featherstone sauntered through the park, and passing through the lodge gates, entered the village, having, as we know, already passed sweet Mary Graham without observing her. As he approached the tree against which she was leaning, his shadow stretched out to her feet, and as he came nearer, partly rested on her form. So shall it rest upon her in the years to come. But heaven's light is also upon her and around her. God shield her, and steer her safely through the rocks !

It was the first time in Michael Featherstone's life that he had visited Cobham, and he experienced a feeling of satisfaction in the personal obscurity which surrounded him.

"No one knows me," he thought ; "I shall see no one I am acquainted with ; I am quite safe, but I can't go walking up and down the village all day. I must kill time somehow."

He commenced the killing of it by halting at the Ship, and calling for a glass of ale and a sandwich. Three or four customers were loitering at the tiny bar, and he asked if he could sit down.

"You can go upstairs, if you like," said the landlord.

Upstairs he went, and sat in an old-fashioned room by the open window, facing the village road. He sipped his ale and ate his sandwich ; then fell into meditation. The sleepy village was sleepier than ever ; all was still and quiet within and without, with the exception of a breeze which had just started into life, and which amused itself by sporting with the stray leaves.

In the course of his meditations Michael Featherstone unbuttoned his respectable black coat, and took therefrom a pocket-book. From amongst a number of papers and letters he selected one which he opened and read, after replacing his pocket-book and rebuttoning his coat. Word for word, the following was the substance of the document.

CHAPTER III.

JAMES WHITELOCK'S CONFESSION.

"I, JAMES WHITELOCK, being laid up by reason of an accident in the docks, give the following information to Michael Featherstone, to act upon as he thinks best. I found the man we spoke of at ten o'clock of a night I can't remember, my head being confused by the accident—but it must be many a month ago—lying by the side of a tree on a short track between Chatham and Rochester, midway perhaps. The track is off the main road and saves a mile and a half. I ought to know that part of the country well; I tramped it years enough.

"I was in a bad case; not a penny to pay for a bed, and three apples and cold water for my dinner that day. Near the man was a horse, with saddle and bridle on, nibbling away at the grass. My first idea was to steal the saddle, though it would have been a hard matter for a suspected man to have turned it into bread and meat. The horse settled that idea for me; I could not get near it, try my hardest. It took two steps backward for my one step forward. My second idea was to look at the man.

"I stooped over him, and couldn't make out whether he was drunk or dead. He made no movement. My third idea was to search if there was anything about him that would be useful to a poor fellow who had never had a five-pound note to bless himself with. He had a ring on his finger; I tried to get it off, but it wouldn't come. He had a gold watch and chain, and I was just about to take them when I thought that money would be safer. So I felt in his pockets.

"In his trousers-pocket were two sovereigns, and some loose silver in a purse. I took the money, and put the empty purse back. That was a good night's work, but I thought what a fool I should be if he had more about him and I left it behind me. A chance like that wasn't likely to occur again. In his waistcoat-pocket a gold pencil case. I left it, though my fingers itched. A pearl and silver knife and a gold keeper in tissue-

paper. I left them all. Then I searched the inner breast-pocket of his coat, which was tightly buttoned, and there I found a pocket-book. It was heavy and bulky. I moved some distance off, to find out what it contained. It was filled with notes and gold. Four thousand pounds in bank-notes and fifty sovereigns. What a haul ! For a minute or two I thought I must be dreaming, but there was the treasure sure enough, and I was wide awake. It was as much as I could do to keep myself from screaming out at the top of my voice, but I kept my excitement down, and set to work like a sensible chap. I took all the money out, and stowed it away about me, and I was about to throw the pocket-book away when I thought of another plan. I went back to the man. He was lying motionless ; he hadn't moved. I fastened the empty pocket-book, and slid it back into the pocket I took it from. Then I buttoned up his coat, and went away. Before twelve o'clock the next day I was thirty miles off.

"I lived well enough for a week or two afterwards ; not too well, because what I had to do was not to draw suspicion upon me. I had plenty to eat and drink, but I never drank more than was good for me ; I had to take care of my property.

"There was plenty of gold for me to live on for a long while. I did not dare to try to change a note ; the whole thing might have been discovered, and there would have been an end of me. I would have left the country if I could, but there would have been too much danger in the attempt, because, for eighteen months to come, I had to report myself to the police once a month for something I had done. It seemed to me that my best plan was to go on quietly till I was free of the police, and then to cut off to America with my property. But I was frightened that I should lose it, or be robbed of it, or that it might be found upon me, before I was a free man to go where I liked without being questioned or taken up ; so I made up my mind to bury it in a safe place, and I thought the safest place would be in the woods, where people wouldn't dream of looking for treasure. I fixed upon the spot, put the bank-notes in a cigar-box which I pitched and tarred well outside, filled it with shavings, and nailed it up. I sewed up the box in canvas, and pitched and tarred that well, and then, one dark night, I stowed it away in Cobham Woods, digging a hole four feet deep, and bedding the box amid a heap of stones. I stamped

the earth above it in a thorough workmanlike manner, and pressed the leaves into the earth, and threw them loosely above that, so that no man would suspect that the ground had been disturbed. There the money lies, safe till some one digs it up. And no one can dig it up who does not know the exact spot, and how it was all done.

“Walk from Rochester to Cobham, through the hop-gardens and woods, till you come to the foot-bridge that takes you into the park. You can't miss the path; there is only one. When you come to the foot-bridge, which is about twelve feet high, with a flight of steps on the Cobham side and a flight of steps on the Rochester side, don't go any farther. Set your face towards Rochester, and measure two hundred yards, no more and no less, and on the right of the path you will see an old chestnut tree, with eleven branches arching over and bedded in the ground, forming a semicircle. Take a piece of cord or wood and make a straight line from the centre branch, which will be the sixth counting either way, to the trunk of the tree. In the centre of this straight line, four feet down, you will find the box sewn in canvas, with the money in it. To make sure of the tree, look well over the bark, Cobham-wards, about four feet from the ground, and you will find the letters “WE” cut pretty deep in. How I came to choose those letters was because I remembered they were affixed in silver on the outside of the pocket-book in which I found the money. That is all I have to say.

(Signed)

“JAMES WHITELOCK.”

“This document is my safeguard,” mused Michael Featherstone, “in case I am interrupted in my night's work. The explanation cannot be otherwise than satisfactory. Having by chance come into possession of the information I resolved to test its accuracy, so that I might return the money to its rightful owner, and clear him from the suspicion which hangs over him. Having been in Mr. Earnshaw's service for a number of years, and having unfortunately joined in his condemnation, and in a measure assisted in his disgrace, I am most anxious to be the first to clear his name from reproach—supposing James Whitelock's strange story be true. Yes, always supposing that. And I thought it best to work alone, so that, in case the story is an invention, further humiliation should be spared a gentle-

man whom I served so long. A noble line of conduct to pursue." The false smile which hovered about his lips as he mentally rehearsed this explanation in the event of discovery now disappeared. "But I am mistaken in you, Michael Featherstone, if you do not perform your task so well as not to run the risk of interruption. You have never yet bungled any job you took in hand, and you are not likely to bungle one now."

With this self-praise he was about to fold the document and replace it in his pocket-book when a singular but perfectly natural circumstance occurred. He was sitting close to the window, anticipating no interruption, and holding James White-lock's Confession loosely in his hand; the door of the room was suddenly opened, and a draught was 'caused; and at that very moment a puff of wind whisked the document out of Michael Featherstone's fingers, and flew away with it. He was so startled and confused that the landlord of the Ship, who was innocently responsible for the affair, regarded him with some suspicion.

"What's the matter?" inquired the landlord.

"The paper! the paper!" gasped Michael Featherstone.

"What paper?" demanded the landlord, looking around to convince himself that nothing had been abstracted.

Michael Featherstone also looked around; so sudden and unexpected was his loss that he was in doubt whether the document was in or out of the room.

"I was reading a paper," he stammered, "as you entered, and it suddenly flew away."

"Magic," suggested the landlord, with a sidelong glance at his guest, who was hunting about the room.

The look, and the tone in which the word was uttered, recalled Michael Featherstone to himself.

"It must have been the wind," he said.

"That's more sensible," remarked the landlord, and both the men looked out of window at once. Nothing could be seen of the paper. "Was it a newspaper?"

"No; a letter. I'd best go and look for it."

"Please yourself," said the landlord indifferently.

But Michael Featherstone lingered yet a few moments, searching nooks and corners with his eyes; he dared not run the risk of leaving a document so compromising behind him.

"The chances are," said the landlord, "that it's outside and not in, and as it seems to be of importance, I'd advise you to look where it's most likely to be found."

Michael Featherstone took the sensible advice, and hurriedly bidding the landlord good-day, left the room and the inn.

The very breezes seemed to conspire against him; they were light but erratic, and blew now this way, now that. Michael Featherstone obtained from them no index to the course of the lost document; he walked a few yards up the street, and then a few yards down, and gazed suspiciously at every man and woman he met. A gaily-decorated pleasure van, crammed with children, followed by a carriage in which gentry were seated, came in view, and he had to stand aside to let them pass.

His suspicious glances were busy among them, but he saw nothing of the Confession. And though he searched high and low, as the saying is, for fully an hour, he was not more successful. The paper was not to be found. Finally his thoughts took the direction of consequences, and shaped themselves thus:

"If another person finds the paper, how will it affect me? Does it inculcate me? Will it bring me into danger? How am I to act so as to escape any evil consequences that may arise? Let me think coolly.

"If it is found, the person who finds it may not be able to read. A clodhopper probably, who does not know A from a bull's foot, and who, if he does not tear it up and throw it away, may keep it to wrap his bread and cheese in. That would be the end of it.

"It may not be picked up at all. It may be torn to pieces by the wind, stamped in the dust, or dropped in a pond, in either of which cases its intelligibility will be destroyed. In that way, also, an end of it.

"But it may be picked up by a person who can read and will attach a meaning to it, and who, out of curiosity or avarice, may visit the spot in which the treasure is buried, for the purpose of digging it up. If so, the probabilities are that he will go to-night and that he will go alone. I shall be there, and shall be able to see for myself. In that case my actions must be guided by circumstances. To one course I am pledged. No man shall possess the money but I, Michael Featherstone. A likely thing, indeed, that I shall submit to be robbed of a fortune when it is within my grasp!

“Say that I am not disturbed to-night. I go ; I find the money. It is mine. What then to do, so that I may have no fears in the future ? Why, to watch near the spot, night after night, for a week or so ; for a fortnight even, to settle the matter once and for all. If no person visits the tree, or lingers near it with a settled design (which it will not be difficult for me to find out), I may rest satisfied that the paper is destroyed without any man being the wiser, and that it can never be brought against me. I have allowed myself to be frightened by shadows. The loss, after all, may be no great one.”

Having thus unravelled the web of consequences, in a manner to quiet his fears, Michael Featherstone turned down a by-lane in a more comfortable frame of mind. Nevertheless he did not relax his watchful glances on all sides of him in his search for the Confession of which he had been so strangely deprived.

Meanwhile let us see what had become of it. The breeze whirled it along, now allowing it to trail on the ground, now whisking it up and twirling it round and round, now dashing it against a hedge where the brambles tore and partly defaced it, and eventually lodged in the branches of a green tree which overlooked a churchyard. There it remained awhile, and presently, once more the sport of fate, it was released again, and fluttered to the ground, within a short distance of Peter Lamb, who was still sorrowing over his mother's grave. Some humble friend of the dead woman had placed a rough cross of wood upon the mound, and Peter Lamb bedewed the cross with his tears and kissed it, and prayed as he knelt by the sacred earth. Then, with chastened heart, he prepared to go forth into the world, a lonely man, and it came into his mind to take with him a little of the mould from his mother's grave, and a few of the wild flowers that grew about it. He felt in his pockets for paper ; he had none ; and he was on the point of carrying away the loose earth in his pocket when his eyes lighted on the Confession, which had just fluttered from the tree. He picked it up, and doubling it over with the writing inside, placed in it some of the earth and a few wild flowers, kissing each one as he gathered it. Then he carefully folded the paper, and tied it round with a piece of string. A sailor may not carry paper in his pockets, but he is seldom without string. He had scarcely noticed that there was writing on the paper. His soul was filled with sorrow, and had no room for curiosity. Be-

sides, his eyes were blinded with tears. Hanging round his neck, hidden beneath his shirt, was a small oilskin bag, in which were some trifling mementoes and a bank-note for ten pounds with which he had intended to gladden his old mother's heart. Unloosening the neck of the bag, he deposited in it the packet of earth and flowers, and with a last sorrowful look at the churchyard, took his departure.

CHAPTER IV.

A POOR BOY'S PHILOSOPHY.

As he walked away he passed the young schoolmaster, Warren Earnshaw, who was standing at the door of the school-house. School was over for the day, and had Peter Lamb been five minutes earlier he would have seen the youngsters scampering out, wild with delight. Only one pupil remained behind, and he was standing by the schoolmaster's side—a lad of fifteen, on crutches, looking so wan and weak, and altogether of so slight a build, that he did not appear to be more than ten. Warren Earnshaw's hand was resting lightly on the cripple's shoulder, and the expression on the lad's thoughtful, intellectual face denoted that he was in the companionship of a man he loved. "There goes a man in grief," thought Warren Earnshaw, and he gazed at the sailor with sympathising eye. He would have deemed it the wildest of dreams had he been told that between him and this stranger from the seas, upon whom he looked now for the first time, a link was forged which time could not break, and which was to produce the strangest results in the future.

"A sailor, sir," said the cripple.

"Yes, Philip," said Warren Earnshaw, "and a decent-looking man. Some trouble seems to have fallen upon him; there are tears in his eyes."

"It falls upon everybody, sir, in one way or another."

"That is true, Philip; you have reason to say so." With a pitying glance at the lad's crutches.

"Oh, I was not thinking of myself," said Philip in a gentle tone; "I might be much worse off than I am. Indeed, sir, I am not at all sure that it is not my good fortune to have a pair of useless legs."

"How do you make that out, my boy?"

"Well, if I were strong, and able to run quickly, and carry heavy weights, and bear much fatigue, I should almost certainly have been sent into the fields to work—perhaps even before I learned to read and write."

"You would have been doing good work in the fields, remember that, Philip."

"I do remember it, sir. I am not speaking lightly of labour, but I am trying, as I have often tried, to prove to myself that the accident which crippled me was exactly what was needed to set me in my right place in the world. As a field labourer I should not have been contented, and to go about one's work with a discontented spirit is not to be desired. Therefore I have reason to thank God for making me as I am."

"Your philosophy, Philip—"

The lad interrupted him brightly :

"Is it philosophy, sir?"

"Without a doubt, unless I greatly mistake the meaning of the term."

"Then," said Philip, with a whimsical smile, "I have reason to be more than ever grateful for my condition, for it has made me a philosopher without my knowing it."

"I was about to say," said Warren Earnshaw, taking up the thread of his argument, "that I should not be surprised to hear that you could find it in your mind to thank the gentleman whose horse ran over you when you were but four years old, and made you the cripple you are."

"With all my heart I thank him," said Philip gravely ; "he has been my benefactor."

"I do not think you have ever related to me the exact particulars, Philip."

"You shall hear them, sir. As nearly as I can remember, I was no more than four years of age when my sister took me out to play in the woods. It was a beautiful spring day, and the woods were full of primroses. I fell to picking them, having even then a passion for flowers, and I had gathered as many as I could hold in my two hands when, looking up, I found myself alone. My sister had gone off with some older playfellows, intending to come back for me. I did not know that, however, and, with my hands full of primroses, I went in search of her. It isn't easy for me now, lame as I am, to lose myself in the woods ; I could find my way through them blindfold ; but I was a little fellow then, and I dare say I was frightened. I can't say how long I was wandering about looking for my sister ; what I remember next is that I was crossing a public road which divided the woods when I heard the sound of a

horse's hoofs, and became confused. The horse as I was afterwards told, had become unmanageable, and was galloping along at a great rate. I was struck down, and lay insensible in the road. Very shortly afterwards the rider, having calmed his horse and brought it to submission, came back to see what mischief he had done, and discovered me lying like dead, with blood about me. He carried me to the village, and found out my parents, and related to them the particulars of the accident. There being no doctor near, he himself galloped off to Rochester, and brought one back with him, who attended me regularly for many months, the gentleman paying him for his services. Well, sir, my parents were poor then, as they are now, and the gentleman behaved nobly. He charged himself with my future, he said, and he has paid them five shillings a week from that time to this, and assisted them in other ways besides. He could not be expected to do more, but he did ; he has paid regularly for my schooling, and when he discovered that I was fond of books he supplied me with them. I have quite a little library at home, and not a book the gentleman has given me is lost or mislaid, though some of the first I had when I was very little are sadly torn. But since I began to understand what books really are I have taken better care of them. They are my true friends, and I look upon them almost as if they have real life in them, and can speak to me. Well, sir, they do live, and they do speak to me. I often wonder how the world got along when there were no books to read ; I am glad I am alive now instead of then."

"Why do you pause?" asked Warren Earnshaw ; for Philip had suddenly broken off in his speech.

"It seemed to me all at once, sir, that I was taking credit to myself to which I am not entitled. My thoughts sometimes run along so fast that I am obliged to pull up. To the gentleman whose horse ran over me belongs all the credit of making me better than I should have been if I hadn't gone out with my sister on that spring morning to pick primroses. It is he who has directed my taste for reading ; all the books I have are of his choosing. But for him I shouldn't know what I know, I shouldn't see what I see. Quiet as is the life we live here, all the world is open to me. That strong man, the sailor who passed us just now, has, by the look of him, travelled over thousands and thousands of miles of sea, but I doubt whether

he knows more of the mysteries of the ocean than I do. I don't say it boastfully, because that would be a piece of foolishness of which I should have good need to be ashamed ; but I am speaking of the power of books and of the gratitude we owe to the writers of them. They are the real teachers. If I could become one—" And here Philip suddenly broke off again, with blushes on his face, and said, "I beg your pardon, sir."

"No occasion, Philip. Who knows," said Warren Earnshaw, with a sigh, "what may happen in the years to come? Your infirmity may prevent you from going out into the world, but you could write what you feel, according to your light and leading."

"Do you think so, sir ; do you think so?" cried Philip, trembling with enthusiasm.

"I am sure so. Go on as you have begun, and you will win both love and respect. You will be more fortunate than I."

"Ah ! no, sir," said Philip, with an earnest look at the young schoolmaster, "don't say that. You know so much more than I, and you are so strong and gentle. If you will forgive me for saying so," and here the lad lowered his head, and an inexpressible sweetness was in his voice, "I love you, sir !"

Warren Earnshaw turned away, so that the groan which he could not suppress should not reach the lad's ears, and the thought which crossed his mind was, "Would this pure-minded, pure-hearted lad say that to me if he knew that upon me and all belonging to me hangs the shadow of an indelible disgrace?"

Philip's sweet voice chased the cloud away.

"You are not angry with me?"

"Angry? No, indeed ! But I have serious troubles to contend with, and I am not always successful in bearing with them patiently. Go, on, Philip ; your ambition is a worthy one."

"It appears to me presumptuous when I think of men whose very names have a charm for me. Till now I have never ventured to speak of it, and I am sure I don't know how it escaped my lips."

"Except that you are conversing with a man in whom you feel confidence, who sympathises with you, and returns your love."

"Thank you, sir. We have not known each other long, but it seems to me as if you had been my friend for years. With

the exception of the gentleman to whom I owe everything I never met one, till you came, who would listen to my foolish talk, and who has encouraged me as you have done. Yes, before anything in the world it is my prayer that I may be able to write. In a few years I shall be a man, and then I must do something to live. I am not strong enough for plough and scythe, I can't drive a horse and cart, but a pen is easily held. The fear is," he said, rubbing his forehead, with another of his whimsical smiles, "whether anything would come. The ladies and gentlemen who came to see me last year may be right in what they said to me."

"What was it they said, Philip?"

"I have never mentioned it, but it has haunted me ever since. I wouldn't mention it now if it wasn't that I should like you to know me exactly as I am, and to hear what others think of me. Well, sir, it was in the evening, when father and mother were at home, and I was sitting in a corner, reading. A carriage stopped at the door, and some ladies and gentlemen got out. My father and mother, as was right, stood before the gentry, and I suppose I should have risen also had my crutches been handy; but one was broken and was being mended. After looking about them and asking a few unnecessary questions, a lady said, pointing to me, 'Is this the clever boy we have heard so much of?' and I turned hot and red; her voice grated upon me. My father replied that I was the only son he had, and referred to the unfortunate accident which had deprived me of the use of my legs. 'Unfortunate indeed,' said the lady, 'for it deprives you of his services, and deprives him of the opportunity of obtaining his livelihood in the station in which he was born.' She took the book I was reading from me, and looked at it. I remember it well; it was 'The Prison Flower.' Have you read it, sir?"

"Yes, Philip. It is a beautiful little story."

"And teaches you something, sir. The lady returned the book to me, and said, 'Do you know anything of history, boy?' I replied that I had read the history of England, and she asked me historical questions, which I answered correctly. She was not pleased; I think she would have preferred an exhibition of ignorance on my part. I had three or four books by my side, and she took them up and looked at them. One was a lesson-book in French, another was Shakespeare's Plays.

'Indeed!' she said; 'French! Are you learning French?' I answered that I had commenced to learn the language. 'You read Shakespeare, too,' she said, seemingly much disturbed. And when I answered that I had read most of his plays, and had read *Hamlet* three times, she was still more displeased. Then she said, addressing her friends, that 'over-education was one of the greatest evils of the age,' and that 'it was never intended that people in a low station should learn what I was learning, and read what I was reading.' I could not see the justice of her remarks, but I did not speak except in reply to questions she put to me. A curious thought came to me at the time. It was that if she could have had her way she would have marked me 'Dangerous;' and yet I was unconscious of having done anything which should reasonably have excited her disapproval. 'Who is it,' she said, 'who supplies you with these books? Your parents cannot afford to purchase them for you.' I replied that the books were sent to me by the gentleman whose horse, running away, caused my accident. 'What is the name of this benevolent gentleman?' she asked; and I told her Mr. William Wentforth. 'I have never heard of him,' she said; 'he is doing mischievous work, whoever he may be.' And then she and her friends took their departure. What do you think of it, sir?"

"That they were unjust to you, Philip," said Warren Earnshaw; "and that you will have it in your power one day to take a fine revenge upon them."

"In what way, sir?"

"When you are a man, write a good book and send it to her. It is an established truth, my lad, that the pen is mightier than the sword. But we have chatted long enough: I want to look over your exercises."

CHAPTER V.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

BEFORE this exchange of confidences had come to an end, Peter Lamb, the sailor, had passed out of the village, not, however, without taking with him some crumbs of comfort. Coming to the little shop kept by Bessie's mother, he knocked at the door, and the woman opened it.

"It crossed my mind," he said half apologetically, "that you might have considered it a liberty when I spoke to you this morning."

"Not at all," she responded heartily: "only it did strike me as curious when you asked me whether I could guess your name."

"Ay, ay, my lass—excuse a sailor's way of speaking; there ain't a bit of harm in it. Your little Bessie and me struck up a friendship the moment we clapped eyes on each other. I told you how I guessed her name at once. Well, my lass, that was rather uncommon, wasn't it? there are so many different names. 'Twas her face that made me divine it; it is for all the world the very image of the face of a little lass, named Bessie likewise, who, if you will believe me, was a sweetheart of mine when she wore short frocks. So it came over me just now, seeing as how I'm bidding good-bye to this part of the country for many a long year to come, that I'd like to leave a memento behind me for the first little friend I made in the village, after fifteen years' absence on foreign seas."

The woman looked at him with deepened curiosity as he laid on the counter the deal box he had brought with him. From his pocket he produced a stout knife, with which he prized up the lid, and then he carefully lifted out a mechanical toy, protected by a glass shade. It represented a ship on green waves; on the background was painted a view of chalk cliffs, with a glimpse of an impossible cornfield—but that mattered little, the colour of the golden corn was so beautiful. Above chalk cliffs, and golden corn, and green seas, shone the blue clouds, with

three birds flying—seagulls, surely ; and on the left of the ship, nestling under the cliffs, were a cottage and a windmill. But that was not all. In the wooden rim beneath the glass shade were two thin pieces of strong wire and a string with a wooden knob on it.

"See, my lass," said Peter Lamb, "this is the way it works"

He pulled one of the wires, and a musical box immediately set up the tune of "A Life on the Ocean Wave ;" he pulled the string, and the waves began to roll and the ship to heave, now sinking, now rising ; the whole being a capital imitation of a ship sailing, shall we say, to New Zealand, or China, or America, or wherever the fancy willed. The woman gazed at the pretty toy with delight, shifting her glances from that to the face of Peter Lamb. Then said the sailor, in a tone very soft and low :

"I brought this home as a present to one who lies in the churchyard yonder."

And pushing one wire in and pulling the other out, the air changed to "Home, Sweet Home."

They both listened in silence, the man and the woman, and the stirring of a responsive chord in their hearts brought tears to their eyes.

"I saw it," said Peter Lamb, referring to the toy, "in a foreign country, many a thousand mile from here, and I said to myself, 'I'll take this home to my old mother. When the ship's a-rolling to the tune of 'A life on the Ocean Wave,' she'll think of me ; and when it's a rolling to 'Home, Sweet Home,' she'll know I'm thinking of her.' It's happened otherwise, and all I can say is, the Lord's will be done ! It's no use my taking it away with me ; it'd only make me melancholy, so I thought it might be agreeable to you if I asked you to accept it for your little Bessie and in remembrance of old times."

The woman looked at him through her tears.

"I know you now," she said ; "you are Peter Lamb, that ran away and went to sea when I was a little girl."

She put forth her hand, and he clasped it, saying :

"Come, that's a comfort, anyhow. I can take this hand-shake with me, and I shall know that I am not quite forgotten. Why, here's my Bessie, that promised to be my little wife when she's big enough ! What do you think of this, my lass ?"

He took the child on his knee, and worked the ship and the music for her, to her infinite wonder and delight.

“This is yours, my lass,” he said, “and mother will take care of it for you. It might be—there’s no telling—that one of these fine days there’ll come from foreign parts a bit of coral, or a shell or two, that can’t be picked up on these shores, so that you may bear in mind the name of Peter Lamb, your sailor sweetheart. Though I don’t doubt,” he added, shaking his head half sadly, half humorously, “that you’ll serve the old tar as a namesake of yours has already done, and’ll throw him over for a butcher or a baker. The best way is to gather the cherries while they’re ripe ; so give me three kisses.”

The child gave him a dozen, and then he set her down, and shaking hands once more with her mother, bade them both farewell, and took the road to Gravesend.

CHAPTER VI.

PRINCE PENNYFOLD.

THE gaily decorated pleasure-van and the stately carriage which had caused Michael Featherstone to stand aside when he was looking for the lost document which Peter Lamb carried away with him, contained in the first place, the pupils of Miss Susannah Peebles, who kept an "Infant and Preparatory School" in Gravesend; and in the second place, not only Mr. Pennyfold's wife and family, but the great Mr. Pennyfold himself. The vehicles had come from Gravesend, and were conveying the gentry and the humbler folk to the woods. The affair, in a word, was an excursion, and the provider of the treat was Mr. Pennyfold, a gentleman who had made his fortune in "barges," and was now retired from business. He lived where his father had resided before him, in Gravesend, in a spacious, old-fashioned mansion, over the walls of which London excursionists who visited the cockney paradise of shrimps and watercress had been wont, till quite lately, to peep, and occasionally to climb: to the great indignation of Mr. Pennyfold, who, if he could have arranged it with the legislature, would have a law passed constituting it a crime for common strangers to gaze upon his plum and cherry trees. However, he did the best he could. He had twelve inches added to the height of the wall, and sharp spikes fixed in the top.

"It is best to let people know what you mean," said Mr. Pennyfold, when he gave the order for the work, "and what I mean is that any person who attempts to appropriate *my* fruit or *my* flowers will have to look out."

He would have been quite sincere had he added, "or *my* air, or *my* clouds, or *my* sunshine, or *my* stars," for all such-like treasures to be viewed or felt within the boundaries of his estate were, in his opinion, not to be lawfully enjoyed by others without his permission.

Although Mr. Pennyfold had made his fortune out of barges, he had never worked in one. His father—ay, and his mother

also—had, and were not ashamed of it. Mr. Pennyfold was, or would have been, had he been compelled to follow in his father's footsteps. With a singular (but not entirely exceptional) ingratitude towards the means of his elevation, he looked down on barges, not in the sense in which they are generally looked down upon, but from a metaphorical—shall we say a moral?—standpoint.

Old Pennyfold, coarse, stumpy, grimy, with eyes always full of dust, and with hands which all the advertised soaps in the world could not have whitened and sweetened, was the founder of the family which, likely enough in this practical age, might one day rise to honours in the State. Barge boy first, working on a wage of many kicks and fewer half-pence a week ; then, in natural progression, bargeman, working on a wage of twelve shillings a week and what he managed to pick up. By that time no one dared to kick him, for he had a pair of fists as hard as iron, and a dogged courage which the fiercest mastiff could not have excelled. Therefore he held his own, and in his rough fashion proclaimed himself Somebody, and made himself respected. So much so that his master's daughter (herself a worker on barges, coarse, stumpy, grimy, with eyes full of dust and hands the colour of his) fell in love with him. It is the story of Whittington over again in a lower social strata. They all do the same, these self-made men, as we are frequently told in story-books ; and not only in printed pages, but in real life also, it frequently happens.

I do not speak slightly, or in derision. With all my heart do I honour this couple, who worked from early morn till late at night, and did their work to the best of their ability, and did it well, without a thought that any special merit was theirs. Stumpy, grimy, ill-favoured, I grant, but they may be credited with the special virtues of industry and straightforwardness—which, in their way, are first-class credentials. Long before the reigning Pennyfold appears upon the scene, old Pennyfold and his faithful mate were done with the world. They died with their wishes fulfilled. Their child had never soiled his hands with work ; they left him an educated man ; they left him a wealthy man. "He shall be a gentleman," they said ; and without considering the material to be worked upon, they spent money liberally in the execution of their heart's wish. To pluck a simile from things familiar to them, it was as though

they had set him on one of their coal barges, and sent him off on a voyage to the Indies.

Barges were not the only things the reigning prince looked down on ; he looked down on his parents in the latter years of their lives as persons immeasurably beneath him. They found no fault with him. "Our boy's a gentleman," they said, and passed away content.

A man—even a gentleman, whatever be the manufactory in which he is turned out—must do something with his time. Mr. Pennyfold would have nothing to do with barges, and was not drawn to devote himself to science, or literature, or agriculture ; his tastes did not run in the grooves of *bric-à-brac*, old china, old pictures, or old books ; he chose his hobby and cultivated it, and its name was philanthropy ; and as the grain of his nature was commercial, he generally contrived to get a good shilling's worth for his shilling. It happens to other men. It was but yesterday, after giving twopence to a poor woman in the London streets, that I felt a glow of self-approval steal along my marrow at the thought that I had done a good action. "What a noble fellow I am !" was my thought. It is true that a moment afterwards I felt humbled in my own eyes, and that I entertained a kind of contempt for the being who gave two coppers in charity, and patted himself on the back for being so good a man ; but this cheap penance did not set me right with myself. Therefore shall I throw no stones at Mr. Pennyfold's glass house ; his doings shall speak for themselves.

The designation of Miss Peebles' school was misleading. It was not an infants' school, for the youngest pupil in it had turned seven, and it was only a preparatory school in the sense that it prepared boys and girls to play the truant, to excel in knuckle-down and fly-the-garter, and to make "game" generally of the much-suffering and kind-hearted mistress. It was not a charity school, though it was almost next door to it. There were between fifty and sixty pupils, male and female, whose ages varied from seven to fourteen (with the exception of two, Thomas Mayple and Thrifty Miller, who were nearly sixteen, and on the point of leaving), and for whose schooling sums varying from twopence to fourpence per week were paid by the parents. A nice time Miss Peebles had of it. Half a hundred turbulent, rollicking, mischievous youngsters, brimming over with animal spirits, to manage seven hours a day for

six days out of the seven. It is enough to drive one crazy to think of it, and the wonder was how Miss Peebles managed to keep in her right senses. I have an idea that there is a species of dispensation which provides for the injection of at least double the allowance of patience, forbearance, and good-nature into the veins of our school-teachers. That is the reason, perhaps, why so many of us who are not school-teachers have a limited allowance of these qualities, for the balance must be struck in some way. But Miss Peebles' head often ached terribly. She was a meek, unoffending little woman, with a large share of the milk of human kindness in her nature, and if her pupils did not learn much in her school, I am sure that she earned the money she received for them.

During the cultivation of his hobby, Mr. Pennyfold one day in Gravesend came upon her school. He happened to be in an idle mood, and the droning within attracted him. Peeping through the window he saw, by the dresses of the pupils, that they were drawn from the ranks of the poor. With the lower classes he never stood upon ceremony. "Here is a school," he mused, "of the existence of which I have been ignorant. I will look into it; it may be something in my way."

He pushed open the door and entered. All eyes were immediately turned upon him, as though they were controlled by a single tap, and every kind of occupation in which the pupils were engaged, serious and otherwise—chiefly otherwise—was instantly arrested. Indeed, the effect he produced was singular and novel. Having made a simultaneous movement of eyes and heads in his direction, Miss Peebles and her pupils seemed to be suddenly transformed to stone, and to be deprived of the powers of motion and volition. So surprising and overpowering was the appearance of the gentleman, that had he commanded them to follow him to instant execution, the only use they would have made of restored animation would have been to rise as one body and obey the command.

CHAPTER VII.

A SCHOOL TREAT.

No such command, however, being given, and animation still remaining suspended, it devolved upon Mr. Pennyfold to restore it.

"Go on, go on," he said, waving a walking-stick ; "do not let me interrupt you."

The sound of his voice broke the charm. Heads and eyes resumed their natural functions, but the spell of Mr. Pennyfold's presence being upon them, they set to work upon their lessons in a spirit so industrious and serious, that Mr. Pennyfold could not be otherwise than gratified at the spectacle.

"Very well," he said, partly to himself, partly to Miss Peebles. "Very well indeed. The schoolmistress ?"

"Yes, sir," replied meek little Miss Peebles.

"My name is Pennyfold."

"Thank you, sir." As though her visitor had presented her with something for which she ought to be grateful.

He put questions to her, and obtained all the information it was in her power to give respecting the school and the scholars, and when he heard that the children's parents were all in a humble station of life, he said in a gratified tone :

"I supposed so. That explains my visit. I take a great interest in the poor." Indicating that poverty enjoyed an exceptional privilege in creating such an interest.

"It is very good of you, sir," said Miss Peebles.

He was a large gentleman, tall and thick ; his hair was sandy, and he had bushy whiskers ; his presence was commanding ; he had an exotic in his button-hole, and in his gloved right hand he carried a Malacca cane with a silver knob. Having exhausted his questions, he stepped authoritatively along the forms, and looked over the shoulders of the pupils at their copy-books. One boy, Tommy Mayple, had a tremendous struggle with himself to prevent himself from giggling ; for Mr. Pennyfold's whiskers, as he leant over and shifted his head, brushed his neck and tickled him to the verge of a dangerous explosion.

"I am very pleased," said Mr. Pennyfold, returning to Miss Peebles; "I shall do myself the pleasure of calling on you again."

Whereat Miss Peebles expressed her acknowledgments of his condescension, and he went away, perfectly satisfied with his morning's work.

He would have been scandalized had he witnessed the imitation which the wag of the school gave of him the moment his back was turned—walking with his head in the air between the forms, flourishing an imaginary Malacca cane, and caressing a pair of imaginary bushy whiskers, to the intense enjoyment of the whole school—with the exception of Thrifty Miller, who took no pleasure in the doings of anybody but himself.

"Return to your seat immediately, you bad boy!" cried Miss Peebles; "I am astonished at you, really astonished!"

The boy who laughed the loudest at the wag's proceedings was Tommy Mayple, who held the foremost place in the affections of all the pupils—again with the exception of Thrifty Miller, who had so much affection for himself that he had none to spare for anybody else.

A prime favourite was Tommy Mayple, with as little selfishness in his nature as in the nature of any boy breathing. Always ready to sacrifice himself for others, always ready to do other boys' lessons and neglect his own, always ready to take upon himself the penalty of his comrades' misdeeds. Fine characteristics, indeed, with which to go through life and fight its battles.

Thrifty Miller was the very reverse. He never thought of any boy but himself, never looked after any boy but himself—a living incarnation of selfishness. He was the pedlar of the school—sold pencils, marbles, tops, bits of leather suckers; lent farthings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, to be repaid in half-pence on Saturdays; was always ready for a "swap," and was always the richer by it; and gave teaspoonfuls of liquorice-water for pins and buttons. His ingenuity was great, and there was no limit to his dealings. He created temptations which the souls of boys could not resist. He made quite a fortune out of cherry-stones, which he used to grind down on each side till a hole appeared, through which he strung them, and sold them to little girls for necklaces and to little boys for watch-chains. He made another fortune out of

horsehair, which he used to pluck slyly from horses' tails. He had the whole school under his thumb, so to speak. If it is true that coming events cast their shadows before, a great career lay in the future for Thrifty Miller.

The visit of Mr. Pennyfold to Miss Peebles' school was an event. Miss Peebles described it as such in her diary, with a capital E. It led to other visits; every one of which ended with Mr. Pennyfold saying graciously: "Very well—very well, indeed. I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon you again"—and with Miss Peebles replying: "Thank you, sir; you are very good."

On the occasions of Mr. Pennyfold's visits the boys and girls were ever on their best behaviour. His portliness, his pomposity, his gloves, his exotic, his Malacca cane with its silver knob, his bushy whiskers, awed them. He acted as a kind of moral policeman over the usually unruly youngsters. It was the habit of Thrifty Miller to fix his eyes upon Mr. Pennyfold with a secretly greedy and envious air, and to minutely observe every detail of his outer person which denoted the possession of wealth.

"Miss Peebles," said Mr. Pennyfold, presenting himself one morning at her desk, "I am glad to be able to express my approval of the manner in which you conduct your school."

Mr. Pennyfold used many words, and generally went round about when he had anything to say.

"I am proud to hear it, sir," said Miss Peebles.

"And I have been thinking," continued Mr. Pennyfold, "in what shape I could best show my appreciation of your humble efforts."

As he paused here, in the evident expectation of an answer, the good little woman said:

"I am sure I don't know, sir;" adding, after the fashion of the present-day cabman, "I leave it to you, sir."

"Can you suggest nothing, Miss Peebles?"

"I should prefer, sir, that it should be an emanation of your mind. So much superior," she murmured helplessly, "to mine."

The artfullest woman in the world could not have paid a gentleman a handsomer compliment than this which fell, without design, from the lips of Miss Peebles.

It was highly appreciated by its recipient, and he smiled benignly upon her.

"It has suggested itself to me," he said, "that an excursion into the country, say as far as Cobham Woods, in a pleasure-van, would be agreeable. What do you think of the suggestion?"

"It is sir," replied Miss Peebles, genuinely pleased, "a beautiful idea."

"In a pleasure-van," repeated Mr. Pennyfold. "The children clean and neat, well scrubbed, hair decently combed and brushed, clothes nicely mended."

"Yes, sir; of course all that would have to be seen to."

"Those details may be safely left in your hands, Miss Peebles. It has also suggested itself to me that we might combine instruction with amusement, so that when the day is over we may retire to rest with the solacing reflection that, while we attended to the bodies of the pupils, we did not neglect their minds. Nature, madam," said Mr. Pennyfold, launching into an aphorism, "supplies a schoolroom so grand that art cannot equal it."

"True, sir," said Miss Peebles, with not the remotest idea of his real meaning; "so much to be learned from her, so much to glean."

"We can take milk and water with us in cans; and biscuits and buns—plain buns, Miss Peebles, no currants—in bags. We must not spoil the children's stomachs, nor give them an opportunity to grumble at the bread and dripping—occasionally, perhaps, treacle—which forms their staple meal in their humble homes. We must not place temptation in their way, nor give them cause to pine for luxuries out of their reach."

"Very true, sir," said Miss Peebles, not venturing to assert that she preferred buns with currants in them.

"Happy the man—and woman—who can supply childhood with delightful memories, eh, Miss Peebles?"

"Indeed he should be, sir, and you may be sure that the children will be grateful."

"I trust so; everything shall be done to make them so. Why, Miss Peebles, I have thought of presenting, at a suitable time in the afternoon, every boy and girl who accompanies us on that auspicious day"—he paused, to give Miss Peebles time to say, "Auspicious indeed, sir, truly so;" and then continued—"with a piece of new money stamped with the effigy of her gracious Majesty the Queen."

"It is very noble of you, sir," said Miss Peebles, in whose astonished mind rose a vision of piles of bright sovereigns—millions of them—with Mr. Pennyfold sitting, like a beneficent mogul, on the top of the biggest pile, and throwing the gold down indiscriminately to the lucky children in her charge.

"We will fix a day for the excursion," said Mr. Pennyfold, glowing with a sense of his nobility. "To-morrow week—will that be suitable?"

"Most suitable, sir."

As though of all the days in the year to-morrow week was the day especially designed by Providence for the carrying out of Mr. Pennyfold's benevolent intentions.

"Shall I announce it to them, Miss Peebles?"

"If you will so far condescend, sir."

"A-hem!" ejaculated Mr Pennyfold, clearing his throat, and addressing the children.

Miss Peebles rapped her desk with a birch-rod, which in her hands, as a symbol of authority, was the absurdest mockery, and cried, in her shrillest tone:

"Attention! attention!"

Fifty-two pairs of eyes and fifty-two expectant faces turned towards the schoolmistress and Mr. Pennyfold.

"Little boys and girls," said Mr. Pennyfold, flourishing his Malacca cane, "in appreciation of the attention you devote to your lessons" (the wag of the school thrust his tongue into his cheek, and made so comical a face that Tommy Mayple, for whose gratification the performance was given, burst into a smothered laugh)—"I trust," said Mr. Pennyfold severely, "that it was not a laugh I heard."

"Please, sir," said the wag, "Tommy Mayple coughed."

"I am glad," observed Mr. Pennyfold, fixing Tommy Mayple with his eye, "that it was a cough and not a sign of levity, which fell upon my ears. I will commence again. A-hem! I have just announced to your esteemed teacher that, if you are good, a school treat will be given to-morrow week, in which you will all participate. A pleasure-van will be at the school-door to convey you to Cobham Woods, there to have games and refreshments, and in the evening will convey you back again. Of course, if any boy with a troublesome cough wishes to stay at home on that day he will be at liberty to do so."

Tommy Mayple grew very red in the face, and Miss Peebles

whispered to Mr. Pennyfold that he was the best boy in the school, and that the last thing he would be guilty of was an act of levity.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Pennyfold to the pupils. "I am glad to hear so good an account of Thomas Mayple. That is all I have to say, except—ah, yes, perhaps it would not be out of place to give three cheers."

The proposition being very agreeable to the children, who were in a state of ecstasy at the prospect of the treat and the holiday, they gave three lusty cheers, which made the walls ring again, Mr. Pennyfold blandly bowing at each cheer.

Busy were the brains of the boys and girls during the ensuing week, their delight being increased by the confidential announcement made to them by Miss Peebles that their patron intended to present each pupil with a piece of brand-new money.

The busiest brain of all was Thrifty Miller's. How to turn the holiday into pecuniary profit to himself—that was the problem upon which he was engaged in the interval. He cleaned and polished his stock of marbles, he brightened his buttons, he picked up all the smooth, round pebbles he could find, and painted grotesque faces upon them, he prepared his bottles of liquorice-water and was altogether indefatigable in his preparations for the approaching carnival. He instilled cunning counsel into the ears of his schoolfellows.

"Get a penny out of your father, and a penny out of your mother. *You've* got an uncle ; get a penny out of *him*. *You're* got a grandmother ; get a penny out of *her*. I shall have such stunning things for you ; there's a man gone to London for them ; such stunning things !—oh, you never saw anything like 'em ! Here, take a suck of this barley-sugar."

Such were the insidious temptings he conveyed to his guileless comrades.

Sharp little man, Thrifty Miller.

The auspicious morning arrived, and the pleasure van, drawn by two horses, was at the school-house door. There was also a carriage, in which were seated, in addition to Mr. Pennyfold, his wife, Mrs. Pennyfold, and his children, Miss Pennyfold (Christian name Eugenia), Miss Laurestina Pennyfold, and Master Ambrose Pennyfold.

The little boys and girls were all ready, and Mr. Pennyfold descended from his carriage to inspect them.

"Very satisfactory, very satisfactory indeed!" he observed to Miss Peebles, who, in a new print dress and a plain straw bonnet, looked the picture of neatness. The children were all decently dressed, and their faces well polished.

"I have placed at the head, sir," said Miss Peebles, pointing to Tommy Mayple and Thrifty Miller, "the two cleverest pupils in the school."

"Very proper, very proper!" said Mr. Pennyfold, and shook hands with the two boys, much to their confusion.

His manner of doing so was to seize their hands suddenly and immediately throw them away.

A problem presented itself—how to get fifty-two boys and girls into one pleasure-van. A very tight fit it proved to be, but it was successfully accomplished after much ramming and poking and squeezing. Tommy Mayple, Thrifty Miller, and Miss Peebles were on the box-seat with the driver, who looked with dismay at the load his horses had to draw.

"Now we are all comfortable," said Mr. Pennyfold, giving the word of command; and away went the pleasure-van and the carriage in the direction of Cobham.

"I say, Tommy," whispered Thrifty Miller, "I wonder where the money is he's going to give us."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLAIN AND BITTER TRUTH.

TIME is a steed of various pace ; it lags or ambles, flies or creeps, according to the humour and circumstances of the man. For Michael Featherstone it crawled along so slowly as to drive him into an agony of impatience. He consulted his watch fifty times an hour ; he counted from one to a thousand over and over again ; he employed a hundred ingenious devices to cheat himself into a profit of a few minutes, but all to no avail ; it seemed as if night would never come.

Scarcely daring to show himself too freely in the village, for fear that his figure might become familiar, and chained to the locality by the fascination which the stolen treasure exercised over him, he deemed it his best plan to seek a secluded spot in the park, and there lie down and wait. He had bought some biscuits to appease his hunger, and he had filled his flask with water to quench his thirst. Water and biscuits were drunk and devoured, and it was not yet five o'clock in the afternoon. He had a newspaper, but he could not read. Scattered words, and sometimes entire sentences, from James Whitelock's Confession, appeared illusively in the columns upon which he endeavoured to fix his attention, and blurred what actually was printed therein. He pulled his hat over his eyes and tried to sleep, and just as he was dozing off a dread came upon him that in his sleep something might happen which would frustrate the scheme he was waiting for night to carry out. This thought caused him to spring to his feet and look before him.

Eventful as the day had been in surprises, the greatest of all greeted him as he rose upright, and confronted Warren Earnshaw, who had been wandering through the park for the last hour, waiting impatiently for six o'clock, when he was to meet the woman he loved at their familiar trysting-place. It was more than a surprise to Michael Featherstone ; in a direct sense it was a shock, which for a little while deprived him of the power of speech. The chance meeting being also a surprise to

Warren Earnshaw, it was natural that the two men should stand for a few moments gazing at each other in silence. Warren Earnshaw was the first to speak.

"You here!" cried the young schoolmaster, and then a suspicion, which instantly converted itself into a certainty, seized him. "You have been watching and waiting for me. Well, you have found me. What do you want?"

"What should I want?" asked Michael Featherstone in return.

He stammered as he spoke; Warren Earnshaw's voice was clear and scornful.

"What should you want?" he echoed. "That is for you to say. I might have expected equivocation from your lips, even in reply to a question so simple. You came to seek me, hearing I was in hiding here."

It was Michael Featherstone's turn now to echo the other's words.

"In hiding here!"

"It is neither more nor less," said Warren Earnshaw; "but use what arts of prevarication you may, you will meet with none from me. What is your purpose? Why do you hunt and pursue me? Speak the truth for once, if it is possible."

"It is my habit to do so," said Michael Featherstone warily, being ignorant, and in his secret heart apprehensive, of the turn the conversation might take. "I am here by accident. Having a day to spare, and being jaded with work in London—"

The young schoolmaster interrupted him impetuously.

"What fresh ruin have you been devising and executing? It must be something weighty to have exhausted you. Once more, what do you want of me?"

"Nothing. So far from requiring anything from you, I would assist you, if you would allow me."

"That is to say," said Warren Earnshaw, his face flushing, "if I begged a shilling of you, you would throw it to me. I have not come to that pass yet. And from you, of all men in the world!"

Indignation mastered him, and he was unable to proceed.

"Always violent and passionate," said Michael Featherstone, growing cool as the young man grew hot, "always impulsive and unjust. Why would you not accept a favour from me?"

"For the reason that I know you, that I have known you

for years, as a man ready at any moment to perpetrate an act of meanness or treachery. Not that in my misfortune—”

“Misfortune!” echoed Michael Featherstone, who had now recovered his self-possession. “Well, let us be charitable, and call it by that name, though some people would give it another.”

“Not that in my misfortune,” repeated Warren Earnshaw, disdaining to notice the taunt, “I should be too proud to accept a helping hand from a person I could respect. I have come as low as that, I who once held up my head so high.”

“Yes,” said Michael Featherstone, “you held it up so high that the fall must be all the bitterer. Better to have been, like me, a lowly worker.”

“A snake in the grass! The truth at last!”

“I can afford to overlook your abuse. I sincerely pity you, Warren.”

“Save me from such pity! And I would have you remember that my name is Mr. Earnshaw. Insult me again by calling me Warren, and I may resent it.”

“By striking me?”

“I would prefer to keep my hands clean; but I declare, on my honour, I will thrash you where you stand if you are not more respectful and less familiar.”

“You struck me once, I remember.”

“Ah! you remember that. Take warning now.”

“I am not likely to forget it,” said Michael Featherstone, “though I forgave you then, as I forgive you now. I bear you no malice; but I am within my right, Mr Earnshaw, in asking why you treat me so shamefully?”

“You dare to inquire why I am filled with indignation at the sight of you! You dare to play the hypocrite’s part even here and now, where it can scarcely serve you in a way you would deem useful! Can I not compel you by some means to drop the mask you wear, and to show yourself in your true colours? Let us see, then, how the account stands between us. If the plain truth sounds bitter, thank yourself for inviting it.”

He paused a moment, and in that moment grew calmer.

“You were my father’s servant. When you were a boy of the streets, in poverty, in rags, your father being in prison for theft—ah! I have stirred you; the mask changes colour!”

“It is like you,” said Michael Featherstone, whose face, at

this reference to his early life, had grown a shade paler, "gentleman as you call yourself, to throw my misfortune in my teeth."

"I used the same word awhile ago in connection with my own position, and used it truthfully. How did you receive it? Not that I have any intention of reproaching you for your father's career—though it may possibly help to throw light upon your own."

"At all events," said Michael Featherstone, with a curious mixture of humility and arrogance, "if my father was not a respectable man, I have not followed in his footsteps; if he cast shame upon the name I bear, I have lived it down."

"The end is not yet," said Warren Earnshaw solemnly; "it is when a man's life is done that the account is balanced. My father, coming upon you by chance in the London streets, a forlorn and wretched lad, drifting into lower depths than those into which you had already fallen, heard from your lips the particulars of a sad story—I will not stop to inquire how much of it was true—took compassion upon you, and resolved to give you a chance to lift yourself from the mire. He brought you home to his house; he clothed you, fed you, educated you, and finding you quick and intelligent, and apparently faithful, he placed confidence in you, and when you arrived at man's estate, you were in a position of trust in his household. I never liked you, and did not hide my dislike. My father remonstrated with me, reproved me, and exhorted me to be more charitable in my opinions; begged me ever to incline to the kindlier view of men and things, and never to be harsh in my judgment; and expressed his thankfulness that he had been the happy means of guiding you from the forlorn condition in which he found you to a career which he was convinced would prove—as indeed he said it was already proving—to be honoured and useful. He did not convince me, and the result has proved whose estimate of you was the correct one. When I look back upon his wonderful kindness and unselfishness, not only in connection with you, but in every action of his life in which you were not concerned, when I think of his unvarying sweetness and goodness to all with whom he came in contact, of his untiring charity and nobility of character, I bow my head in reverence, and thank God for giving me a father whose soul, whatever may be the verdict of the world, is pure and unsullied.

Will it gratify you to learn that he has lost his reason, which the doctors declare he can never recover, and that it were better he were dead than to linger on in the condition to which his misfortunes have brought him?"

"Poor man, poor man!" murmured Michael Featherstone. "Is it so bad as that?"

"I will finish the story which your presence has forced from me. Who should know better than you how loved and honoured my father was by all? He himself was in a position of trust, and an unhappy day arrived when it fell to his lot to perform a delicate and difficult task which no person in the bank in which he held an important place could perform so well. It was to recover a sum of money which a customer had embezzled, and my father's duty carried him to Chatham, where he met the man who had possession of the sum. Certain circumstances attending the affair—one of which was that the thief was a near relative of one of the directors, and that this gentleman wished to avoid a public exposure which would bring discredit to his name—rendered it necessary that the mission upon which my father was engaged should be private. He was strictly enjoined not to speak of the matter to any person under any circumstances. My father so worked upon the fears of the thief that he recovered the greater portion of the money, and he wrote to the manager of the bank announcing his success, and stating that he would be in London in a couple of days. He rode back, and wishing to spend a night in Rochester, started from Chatham late in the evening. To shorten the journey he took a short track, and striking incautiously between some trees, did not notice a suspended branch which had been broken by the wind. The branch caught him on his neck, and bore him from his horse to the ground, where he lay insensible for many hours. It was not until sunrise the following morning that he came to his senses; bewildered, he gazed around, and for several minutes could not realize what had occurred. His first thought after his memory returned was of the money he had recovered for the bank. He had secured it in his pocket-book, which he had placed in an inner breast-pocket of his coat. This coat was tightly buttoned up when he started from Chatham on the previous evening, and it was tightly buttoned now; his astonishment, therefore, was the greater when, upon unbuttoning

it and taking out his pocket-book, he found it empty. Four thousand pounds in notes and fifty sovereigns in gold had been abstracted from it during his state of insensibility. A little loose money of his own had also been stolen from a purse which had been replaced empty in his pocket. What was he to do? If he went to a police-station and gave information of the robbery, he would be compelled to break the obligation of secrecy which had been laid upon him. He decided that his only course was to get back to London as soon as he could, and report the unfortunate circumstance to the bank. He arrived in London shortly before midnight, and came home at once, it being too late to go to the bank. Now, mark. During his absence I had discovered that for several months past you had been robbing him systematically of small sums of money; I said nothing to you about it, but resolved to expose you to my father immediately he returned. I was up when he arrived, and was alarmed at his appearance. His system had received a severe shock from the accident in the woods, and his mind was racked by the loss of the money, which he would have to repay. Upon my telling him that I wished to speak to him upon an important matter, he begged me to reserve it till the morning, and retired to his study to look over letters which were awaiting him, and to write an intelligible account of the misfortune which had befallen him. If I was alarmed at his appearance in the night, I was shocked at it in the morning. His face was haggard, and he seemed to have grown ten years older in as many hours. Before I unburdened myself to him he asked me to listen to him. He related what had occurred since he left home, and then told me of another cruel loss. Among his correspondence was a letter demanding the immediate payment of a larger sum of money than that of which he had been robbed. He had become security for a friend for this amount, and the friend had speculated and lost every shilling he had in the world. The letter my father had received was from a legal firm, and announced that proceedings would be immediately taken against him if the money for which he was security was not paid before eleven o'clock on this morning. 'I have notes to the amount,' said my father, 'in my safe, which I intended to offer to the bank; but this is the more pressing misfortune of the two. I owe the money, and it must be paid; you will

take it to the lawyers, and settle the just claim they have against me. If the directors decide that the loss of the money I recovered must fall upon me, all I can do is to offer to repay them gradually out of my salary. It will pinch us hard for a few years, and the prospects I had in view for you must be relinquished.' I bade him not to grieve for me, and said that I would work and help him in the coming struggle ; and then I briefly told him of the wrong you had done him. It was an additional grief, because of the trust he had reposed in you, and he said he would consider what was best to be done; meanwhile, no mention of my discovery was to be made to a third party. He handed me the money to pay the lawyers, and I left him. We met again at noon, and I was rejoiced to find him in a calmer and more hopeful frame of mind. He had explained the circumstances of the robbery to the manager, and had handed him the written statement he had prepared. Nothing could be decided till the directors held a consultation in the afternoon. On my part, I had paid the lawyers the money due on my father's security, and had received a clear quittance of their claim against him. 'We shall be poor,' said my father, 'but no stain will rest upon us.' On that evening he received a note from the bank, summoning him to attend a meeting of the directors on the following day. He returned from that meeting ruined and broken-hearted. The directors refused to believe his statement, and said they had received information that the robbery was a fiction invented by him, and that he had used the money to save him from disgrace which threatened him in another quarter. When he indignantly denied the charge, they said there was an easy way to disprove it, and asked him to furnish them with the numbers of the bank-notes he had received from the man who had embezzled the money of the bank. This my father could not do, upon which the directors said no other course was open to them than to discharge him. The circumstances of the case, they said, precluded them from prosecuting him ; he had been engaged upon a secret and confidential mission, which on no account was to be made public, and he had taken a shameful advantage of the fact. They informed him that there could be neither legal nor moral doubt of his guilt, and that he was discharged from their service a disgraced and degraded man. It was you, Michael Featherstone, you whom my father rescued from the gutters, who had fabri-

cated this infamous story to ruin him and save yourself. You were in the house when I exposed you to my father ; you must have listened at the door, and heard what passed between us ; and with a thief's cunning you hastened to the bank to crush your benefactor. You succeeded ; you have destroyed him, and have yourself escaped the consequences of your misdeeds. Not content with that, you follow me here, with a hidden purpose in your mind, to work further mischief. I call down heaven's judgment upon you ! It will come, as surely as you stand before me, for it cannot be that a being so ungrateful and treacherous shall pass through life unpunished. Go now from my sight, and work what evil you may—and take with you the scorn and contempt of a man whose fair promise of an honoured life you have blighted !”

Several times in the course of this narration Michael Featherstone had been on the point of interrupting the young schoolmaster, but was restrained by a powerful feeling of curiosity to learn how much or how little Warren Earnshaw knew of the hidden treasure. That no reference to it was made, directly or indirectly, afforded him great satisfaction ; he was convinced that Warren Earnshaw had no suspicion of its existence.

“There is no need for violence, Mr. Earnshaw,” he said ; “I will go, as you desire me, and I have no wish to meet you again. But before I leave you I owe a duty to myself which must be fulfilled. You have brought a charge against me of having robbed your father of small sums of money. It is untrue, and had you ventured to openly accuse me, you should have smarted for it ; nothing would have been easier than to clear myself and to make you pay for the libel. Again—you accuse me of having gone to the directors of the bank, and denounced your father to save myself. That, also, is untrue. The directors, knowing that I was in your father's confidence, sent for me and requested me to enlighten them as to his private affairs ; they did this because they had some cause of suspicion against him which they did not communicate to me. Before I had been in the room with them a minute I knew, from the questions they put to me, that they did not believe the story he had told them. I could not refuse to speak the truth. I told them of the loss he had sustained by becoming security for a friend, and how necessary it was for his own credit that a large sum of money should be immediately paid—”

"You convict yourself," said Warren Earnshaw. "By what means did you become acquainted with his loss? He himself knew nothing of it till he came home from Chatham."

"Is it impossible," said Michael Featherstone in an injured tone, "after you left him in his study and retired to your room, that he should have sought me to ask whether I could advise him in his difficulty? Do you not see how all your suspicions and accusations melt away when exposed to the clear rays of truth? If you still doubt me, question your father—though, I forgot; he has lost his reason, you say. He cannot, therefore, do me justice."

"I will hear no more," said Warren Earnshaw. "Were you an honest man you would have met my charges against you in a manly spirit. Instead of that, you fawn, you crawl, you whine, and still endeavour to deceive. Your shifting glances, your tell-tale face, your smooth tongue, condemn you. Quit my sight while you are safe, for it may be that I shall be unable much longer to control the feelings of anger your presence keeps alive."

Michael Featherstone deemed it wise to take the hint, and with a last stealthy look at the man he had wronged in the past, and was about to wrong more deeply in the future, crept slowly away.

"All safe, all safe!" he murmured as he picked his steps through the stately trees. "He knows nothing, suspects nothing. If you had been less proud, Warren Earnshaw, I might have taken compassion on you, and in acquainting you with the discovery I have made of the manner in which your father was robbed, have shown you the way to clear yourself and him from the shame and dishonour which hang over you. But your overbearing spirit, and the hatred you have always borne towards me, deserve their just punishment—and I inflict it upon you. I hold you like this." And stretching out his right hand, palm upwards, he stiffened his fingers, and crooked them forward with vicious force. "Release yourself if you can. You have proclaimed your opinion that I am not made of the same quality of flesh and blood as you are—that I have coarser feelings, a more brutish nature—that I am baser even than animals—a snake in the grass! Because my father was unfortunate, and fell under the ban of the law, you fling his disgrace in my face. Be it so. Take *your* father's disgrace for your heritage. We are quits, Warren Earnshaw!"

CHAPTER IX.

A GOOD WOMAN'S LOVE.

THE trysting-place of the lovers was in a secluded part of the park, into which strangers seldom found their way during summer, principally for the reason that the narrow path which led to it from the public road was almost hidden from view by the foliage of the trees; passers-by were also deterred by a notice painted on a board warning them not to trespass. The owner of the estate gave permission to some to use the private paths, and among the favoured ones were Warren Earnshaw and Mary Graham.

The lovers were sitting on a rough bench, from which they overlooked the shady coverts of a wood in which wild fowl were nesting. On their right was a lake of water-lilies, and on their left a fish-pond, plentifully stocked. On either side was a long stretch of velvet land, dotted with bushes and trees, and so thickly carpeted with emerald moss that a man might walk for a mile and not hear the sound of his footsteps. An exceeding stillness reigned around, and but for the voices of the lovers and the occasional cry of a wild bird calling to its mate, the spot might have been imagined to be the abode of the Spirit of Peace, dedicated to holy silence. Nor, indeed, would the low, soft tones of Mary Graham have disturbed this idea, her voice was so sweet and gentle. Far different was it with Warren Earnshaw. Not only his voice, which was often raised in passion, but the strong emotion depicted in the play of limb and feature, would have conspired to destroy any such imagining. In him was represented a storm travelling over restless seas; in her, the sacred stillness of a starry night resting on peaceful waters. Even in his tenderness towards her there was a touch of bitterness, drawn from the cruel circumstances of his position. He had not learnt the lesson of patience, and he made his hard lot harder by vain frets and sighs. Mary's quiet efforts had but one aim—to calm the tempest of his soul.

"It does me good, Mary," he said in response to a remark

she made, "to chafe and fume. It is only when I am with you that I can obtain this relief to my pent-up feelings. The sight of that man an hour ago, and the remembrance of the wrong he had done my father—but that, indeed, never leaves my mind—stirred me with such resentment that I scarcely dared trust myself. It was well for him and for me that he left me when he did. Not to me belongs the credit of being able to curb a passion of which, just though it be, I am truly ashamed. Your dear face rose before me and held me back; your dear voice seemed to say, 'For my sake, Warren, be calm; withhold your hand, and leave his punishment to God!' It is you he has to thank for his escape."

"I am glad," said Mary, taking his hand and holding it in hers, "that I have that influence over you. Dear Warren, think of me always in that light; and when you are alone, suffering from those bad memories, find comfort in the thought that I love you."

"I will try to do so, Mary; indeed it has often comforted me; but there comes immediately afterwards the torturing reflection of the wrong I have done you."

"In what way have you wronged me, Warren?" she asked with a bright smile.

"In thrusting myself upon you," he replied; "in asking you to link your fortunes with mine, your fate with mine. Then I argue with myself, and strive to find justification for my fault in the knowledge that it was done in happier days, when my future was fair. I should not do you the wrong now, Mary, if I had not spoken then."

"Do you mean," she said, her bright smile still shining on him, "that loving me, and knowing that I love you—you *do* know it, do you not, Warren?"

"Yes, dear, I know it to my sorrow."

"To your sorrow, Warren?" she said, kissing his hand. "But I will speak of that presently. What I was about to say when I interrupted myself is, that knowing we love each other truly, you would not ask me to be your wife now, because you are in trouble."

"Yes, Mary, that is what I meant; I would not do you the injustice; I would not have dragged you down with me."

"Does it occur to you, dear," she said, placing her other hand on his so that it should not easily escape her, "that you

are doing me a greater injustice by showing a want of confidence in me."

"Mary!" he exclaimed, much startled.

"Yes, dear, I am expressing myself quite clearly, as you will own presently, for I know you, Warren, better than you know yourself. I am sure, I am *sure* that you have not the opinion of my love which your words seem to imply. Is woman's love proved only when days are bright, when the sun is shining? Then of what value is it? How poor and mean a thing it would be if it were so! Why, it would make me as proud and happy as a woman could ever hope to be if you, being in misfortune, as you are, and knowing I love you, as I do, were to come to me and ask me to share your lot. How should I construe it? Into a wrong deliberately inflicted upon me by you? No, Warren. I should say, 'He places a true value upon the love I bear for him; he knows that it is his when the clouds are dark, as it is his when they are bright; he knows that my dearest wish is to be by his side, to help, to cheer, to comfort him; he crowns me with the best crown a woman can wear, the crown of faith and belief in her truth!' Why, if you did not come to me, I should, if I saw the way, come to you, and say, 'Take me, Warren, take me, and let me show you my heart, which beats for you, and for you alone; let me rob you of the misery which lies in loneliness; let me share with you in your days of doubt and struggle as you would let me share with you in your days of hope and prosperity!' And you, Warren, would *you* say that my love brought you sorrow instead of joy, or would you open your arms and say, 'Come, Mary, we will walk through life together, and I thank God for the hour in which our souls were united?' Answer me, dear."

"How can I answer you?" he said, his rebellious spirit calmed by the beautiful proof of devotion and unselfishness she had given him. "How can I answer you except by repeating your words, and thanking God with all my heart for having brought us together?"

"There is another and a higher view, dear," she said, and now in her voice there was even a deeper earnestness. "This life is but a preparation. Shall we, then, by continually fretting ourselves and gazing for ever gloomily around, shutting our eyes to the sweetness and goodness of the world, condemn ourselves to wander in darkness all our days? Shall we forget that there

is a God above and around us, and that faith and trust in Him bring balm to every human heart? I was reading in a little book this morning words which I shall strive ever to remember. A daughter is comforting her father in his affliction, and she says that there are lighthouses all along our lives, and that God knows when it is time to light the lamps. Remember this, dear, and never lose hope, or faith or trust."

They sat in silence for a little while, hand in hand, and to Warren's eyes the skies were fairer, the air sweeter, and all nature more beautiful.

"Do you really feel certain," said Mary presently, "that this man you met, who has so wronged your father, is here for the purpose of doing you harm?"

"I am convinced of it, Mary, and I must leave the place. There is, indeed, no reason for my stopping longer than a few more days. The schoolmaster for whom I have acted deputy has written to me that his health is much improved, and that he will return next week to resume his duties. I am glad of this, for I have also received news that my poor father is worse, and needs my care. In a few days I go to London."

"You will write to me, Warren?"

"Yes, Mary; I will write to you regularly, and I shall look forward to your letters with eagerness."

"Have you an idea of any special work that you may be able to obtain?"

"None. It will be difficult for me to obtain employment, I fear. My name, and the disgrace which hangs over it, will stand in my way."

"You must keep up your courage, dear."

"I will try to do so."

"You are a beautiful writer, Warren, and a good accountant. You may obtain a situation in a merchant's office."

"Such a position, Mary, is almost invariably a position of trust. A good character is needed. It happens to be a misfortune to me, although my dear father acted for the best, that I have never yet been engaged in business of any kind. He had loftier views for me. With what pride he used to speculate upon my future! Heaven knows what definite position in life he thought me capable of filling, and I, with a young man's careless spirit, was only to wait for the right thing to present itself. No, Mary, I am afraid that I shall have to look lower

than a merchant's office ; but I shall be grateful for anything that offers, and you may depend upon it, if I am fortunate enough to get work, that I shall do my best to earn the respect and esteem of my employers. What man can do I will do. It cannot, cannot be that the misfortune which has come upon us shall be allowed to darken all my future life and to blight my most cherished hopes ! ”

“ No, dear, it will not be ; but you must have patience and great courage.”

“ Ah, if I had you always by my side, to check my rebellious thoughts ! But that is impossible ; and yet so little is needed to turn the current and steer my boat into a happy harbour. A month ago I had some hope ; from the careful calculations I made I gathered that from the wreck of our fortune a small sum would be saved. And it was, Mary. I received a letter from the agents we employed to sell our house and furniture, and wind up our affairs, informing me that there was a balance of three hundred pounds in their hands, after paying every debt we owed—except, of course, the four thousand pounds of which my father was robbed. Three hundred pounds, Mary ! sufficient to set up a modest little home in which we could live together, with love to sweeten life's hard battle ! ”

“ Yes, dear,” said Mary quietly.

“ How overjoyed I was ! What plans I laid out ! I saw our little nest, and you in it, the good angel of our home ! I made up my mind to run to London and get the money, and to come back and throw it in your lap. You would have consented, Mary ? ”

“ Gladly, Warren. I feel, I know that my place is by your side. Whether it is to be soon or late, you will find me ready. If it is ordained that I am to wait till I am an old woman before you call me wife, I shall wait without repining. Not because I make light of love, but because God will inspire me with resignation to submit to His will. You believe it, Warren ? ”

“ Dear woman, sweet comforter, I believe it.”

“ Well, Warren, you did not go to London.”

“ No. Two days after the letter arrived I received another from the agents, informing me that my father, to whom reason appeared to have suddenly returned, called upon them and demanded the balance due to him. They handed it to him, and

I subsequently learnt that he sent it to the directors of the bank as the first instalment of the debt he owes them."

"It was noble," said Mary, with glowing face. "Surely that was to them an undeniable proof of his honesty and truth."

"It was not," said Warren despondently. "They regarded it, I am told, as a piece of cunning on his part, to induce them to remove the ban of shame they had placed on him. Such is man's justice. Better to have used the money as I hoped and intended."

"You must not say so, dear ; I would not have it so, though it separates us perhaps for years. Ah, how I honour him for the deed !"

"I too, Mary, when I am not carried away by my own selfish desires and wishes. It is strange that he has had no other sane interval. And now, Mary, enough of myself. Let us speak about you. What will you do should you be unfortunate enough to lose your present home ? How will you live ?"

"I have no fears for myself, Warren ; I am strong—yes, indeed, stronger than you think, and I am sure I shall be able to get along."

"It is natural I should feel anxious about you, Mary. You were brought up as a lady, without an idea that the day might come when you would have to work for a living."

"With so many wasted years behind me," said Mary cheerfully, "I must do my best to make up for lost time. Do not worry about me, dear."

"But what work could you do ? What are you fitted for ?"

"For many things, I hope. I might get a situation in a draper's shop, to serve behind the counter——"

He did not allow her to finish ; he started up impatiently in great agitation, and walked swiftly to and fro. She waited till he returned to her and sat again by her side.

"I cannot bear to think of it, Mary."

"It must be thought of," she said, with gentle firmness, "and the future must be faced in a brave and hopeful spirit. It is true that during my father's life my dear mother and I lived as ladies do, and had servants to help us in all sorts of idle ways. My mother occupied herself with lace work, more for amusement and pastime than for anything else, but she had an exquisite taste for the work, and I learnt from her how to

make many kinds of lace. Upon my father's death our palace of idleness crumbled away. His speculations had failed, and our home, like yours, had to be sold off. My mother only lived for two years afterwards ; she took my father's death so much to heart that she died of grieving. During those two years we supported ourselves by selling a great deal of my mother's lace, and by making more ; and despite our reverses, Warren, I derived real pleasure from the reflection that I was becoming a useful member of society. People thought us well off, but we were really poor ; we did not want, however, and when my dear mother died I had a few pounds in my purse. She left a letter for the good friends with whom I am now living, and they offered me a home ; but I cannot expect them to keep me always. I do what I can to assist them ; it is very little, they are so accustomed to doing everything for themselves. Changes will come, of course ; I fancy already I see signs that in a year or two I shall not be living with them. So I have been preparing, Warren. See"—and she pointed to the lace round her neck, and on the sleeves of her dress—"I made all this myself, and it is really very handsome—and very expensive if you had to buy it. In a shop they would charge a great deal for it. I shall be able to earn money, dear ; I am earning it already. Last week I sent some of my lace to London, and what do you think I got for it ? Three golden sovereigns, actually three pieces of bright gold, and I have plenty more to sell. These three sovereigns, with what I saved before, make me quite rich. You would hardly believe it, Warren : I can give change for four five-pound notes. Twenty pounds ! It is a fortune. And now, dear, you will not make me sad, will you ? I have set my heart upon something, and it is your duty to give me pleasure when it is in your power."

"Dear girl," he said, "only tell me what to do to bring one ray of sunshine into your life, and you will make me the happiest man on earth."

"Well, then," she said, with a smile which would have been all glad but for little anxious twitches about her lips which she could not conceal, "I have worked a silk purse for you, and you must not refuse to take it."

"Refuse it ! No indeed !" he said, as she gave him the pretty purse.

He took it from her smilingly, but he became grave the

moment it was in his hands. Certainly for a silk purse it was very heavy ; with reason, considering that it contained ten sovereigns. He shook his head with a loving light in his eyes, emptied the purse of its gold, kissed it and put it into his pocket. Then he gave her back the money.

"I cannot take it, dear," he said. "Do not make me unhappy by endeavouring to force it upon me. I am not quite beggared yet, and you have instilled not only courage but hope into me. I shall go to London with a brave heart, and shall waste no more time in grieving. Dear love, I will strive to prove myself worthy of you ! The lamps are lighted on my way !"

The silver lilies in the lake sank to their rest, and upon the western skies lay a shining field of gold and rubies ; and still the lovers sat and talked in tender tones. When at length the gathering shadows warned them that it was time to part, they walked hand in hand through the solemn silences of the sleeping woods, strengthened for the battle which lay before them.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISING ADVENTURE.

MR. PENNYFOLD, having great confidence in his administrative abilities, had consulted no person but himself in the arrangement of the details of the school treat. He had settled all his plans beforehand, and, as he believed, left nothing to chance.

"When you hear the sound of a horn," he said to the driver of the pleasure-van, before they started, "you will be kind enough to pull up."

The driver nodded sulkily; his mind was disturbed. Miss Peebles' mind was in a similar condition. There were no signs of refreshments in either the pleasure-van or the carriage. Had her patron forgotten the buns (which she was now prepared to most gratefully accept without currants), and the milk, and the plain biscuits? She did not dare to put the question, although the opportunity was afforded her when they were a mile from Gravesend. With a grand air Mr. Pennyfold pulled the green-baize bag from beneath his seat, and drew therefrom a bright brass trumpet. He called it a horn because he thought it had a more distinguished sound. Putting it to his lips, he blew a blast so discordant as to strike terror to the hearts of a flock of sheep in a neighbouring field; they scampered away as though they were suddenly stricken with madness, and Miss Peebles was so startled that she almost tumbled off the van.

"Set still, marm," said the driver; "it's only the gemmun behind a-blowing his trumpet."

Mr. Pennyfold, alighting from his carriage, strolled to the pleasure-van, where the heated driver was wiping his forehead, and asked the man how he was getting on.

"If I must speak the truth, sir——" the driver said.

"Always, always, I trust," interposed Mr. Pennyfold.

"To git on at all with sich a load behind me," continued the driver, "is a job—not to put too fine a pint on it—as I shouldn't care for every day in the week."

"My man," said Mr. Pennyfold, "does not your master pay you?"

"Who said he didn't?" retorted the driver. "But when you hired a pleasure-wan off him to take a few young uns to Cobham Woods, I don't think it come into his mind that there was over fifty on 'em."

"The more the merrier," said Mr. Pennyfold, declining to be ruffled by the driver's evident ill-humour.

"You tell the guv'nor that when we git back," said the driver, adding gloomily, "if we ever *do* git back!"

Miss Peebles gave utterance to an apprehensive scream. Visions of famished children sleeping all night under the trees (The Babes in the Wood multiplied by twenty-six) rose before her.

"Do not be alarmed," said Mr. Pennyfold to her; "the day will glide away"—he looked around for a simile, and found it in the skies—"like a summer cloud. As for you, my man, if you do your duty cheerfully you will not be the worse off for it when we return to Gravesend."

"I shouldn't object," said the driver, "to a fippeny bit on account, for a pot of beer."

Why he asked for a coin not made in the Mint was not very clear, unless, indeed, he was inspired by unworthy forebodings upon the subject of the "tip" hinted at by Mr. Pennyfold.

"No, no, my man," said Mr. Pennyfold jocosely, "you've pleasure enough to go on with."

"How do you make that out, guv'nor?"

"The pleasure of doing good," said Mr. Pennyfold, looking at him with a pleasant smile, "how much does that count for?"

"Never *could* understand subtraction," replied the driver with a subtle touch of humour, adding in a lower tone: "Take nothink from nothink, and what remains?" Then he busied himself with the thong of his whip, with the air of a man who declined to be drawn into further conversation.

"And you," said Mr. Pennyfold to Miss Peebles, "are you all comfortable?"

"Quite comfortable, sir I thank you," she replied in a dubious tone; she was inwardly wishing that the pleasure-van had been made of some elastic material, or that it could be drawn out like a telescope. "Perhaps the children will enjoy the freedom of the woods all the more for a little squeezing."

"A commendable sentiment, Miss Peebles. When we arrive at the woods I have an agreeable surprise for you and them. You will be rejoiced when you learn its nature. And now, my man," to the driver, "wait till you hear the horn before you start again. A lovely day—a most lovely day!"

At Silverwell, which was nearly half-way on their road, they made another halt, the blast which Mr. Pennyfold blew upon the trumpet being even more discordant than his previous efforts. It brought all the women to their cottage-doors in a state of alarm. Miss Peebles had been much exercised by Mr. Pennyfold's announcement of a surprise in store for them when they arrived at the woods. An agreeable surprise, he had said. She was not only easier in her mind with respect to the milk and buns but she was filled with pleasurable anticipation.

There was a well at Silverwell, and Mr. Pennyfold bargained for two buckets of water and the loan of a tin mug. He himself served out the refreshment to the children, who drank eagerly and gratefully. He would have offered some to the driver, but that individual had left his horses, and had walked up the road to a wayside alehouse: he was now returning, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. To Mr. Pennyfold's remark that it was dangerous to leave his cattle, who might have taken it into their heads to run away, he replied, with an incredulous laugh:

"What, with that load! There ain't a pair of horses in the country as'd be equal to it."

"Been thinking of the surprise I spoke of, Miss Peebles?" asked Mr. Pennyfold, ignoring the driver.

"It has occupied my thoughts, sir," said Miss Peebles: "and our little men here. Tommy Mayple and Thrifty Miller, are in a great state of curiosity about it. Whatever can it be?"

"Havn't you an idea?"

"I haven't," replied Miss Peebles, "the ghost of one. Would it be presumptuous to inquire its nature?"

But Mr. Pennyfold shook his head merrily, and said the secret was his, and he did not intend to divulge it till the proper time, adding that it *was* very strange that Miss Peebles, of all the people in the world, should not be able to guess it. This, of course, made her more curious than ever, but did not in the least assist her.

They did not stop again till they reached the woods, Mr. Pennyfold's carriage leading the way after they passed through

Cobham. They halted at one of the entrances to the woods, where a covered cart awaited them.

"That," thought Miss Peebles, "is the surprise. A most kind-hearted gentleman! Trap, bat, and ball, I shouldn't wonder, and kites, and skipping ropes."

The children were glad to get down from the van and stretch their limbs. They would have scampered away on the instant had not Mr. Pennyfold called them to order. One of his own men-servants had charge of the cart, and after exchanging a few words with him, Mr. Pennyfold marshalled the children in line, dividing them into four bands of thirteen each, and appointing a captain to each band, who was made to understand that he was responsible for the safety and good behaviour of those under his command. Then Mr. Pennyfold gave the order to march, and they followed the cart into the recesses of the forest, halting eventually at a clearing completely surrounded by trees.

"This will do," said Mr. Pennyfold, "nicely. Little boys and girls, listen to me. You are at liberty to have games in the woods for an hour. At the expiration of that hour I shall blow the horn, when every one of you will return to this spot for the purpose of continuing the day's enjoyment. Do not, unless you wish to get yourselves in trouble, wander too far; do not fight; and keep your hands from picking and stealing. Really," he observed to Miss Peebles, "as a stretch of fancy I might call myself Robin Hood, and these my merry, merry men."

"If I might venture to suggest, sir," said Miss Peebles, who had detected signs of hunger among the children, "that the young people would gratefully accept a plain biscuit—to say nothing of a cup of milk—I trust you will not consider it a liberty?"

"Not at all, my dear madam," said Mr. Pennyfold jovially; "but allow *me* to be the best judge."

"Oh, certainly, sir," said Miss Peebles hastily, fearing that she had gone too far; "it was merely a suggestion. I should not presume to set my judgment against yours."

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Pennyfold with condescending nods, "I understand that. Let the little boys and girls get their appetites well sharpened by playing in the open air, and they will more thoroughly enjoy the meal we shall prepare for them. Go along, boys and girls, go and play, go and play."

Away scrambled the children with shouts, Miss Peebles running after them distractedly this way and that, in fear that some of them might get into mischief and hurt themselves.

Then commenced the practical machinations of Thrifty Miller. He bargained with this one and that one, he tempted and enticed them, he extolled his wares in magniloquent language, he decoyed innocent victims into convenient nooks and despoiled them of their pennies, in exchange for marbles and buttons and cherry-stones and horsehair, all of which he got back for teaspoonfuls of weak liquorice-water. He was in his glory ; never in his life had he had such a day. His profits were fabulous, and so rapid was he in his speculations, never giving the simple ones time to think twice, that in three-quarters of an hour he had almost sold out.

Some small portion of his stock-in-trade he wisely reserved, with an eye to the pieces of brand new money which Mr. Pennyfold had promised to distribute. Dismissing the last of his victims, he plunged his hands into his breeches-pockets and gleefully turned over the farthings and halfpence with which they were filled. He did not venture to expose the money to the light of day. In alliance with the enterprising qualities which distinguished him was an enormous organ of secretiveness, which would have struck wonder to the soul of a phrenologist. His mind was busy with visions of wealth in the future. Why, when he was a man he might be as rich as the great Mr. Pennyfold ! But catch him giving school-treats, and paying for pleasure-vans ! Not he, indeed ! He knew a trick worth two of that. A fool and his money soon parted—that was Thrifty Miller's favourite proverb.

Engaged in building his golden castles in the air, he wandered unconsciously to a secluded part of the woods, and was suddenly made aware of his lonely position by a strong rough hand on his shoulder, spinning him round and round like a teetotum, till he became quite giddy. The assault took away his breath, and when he recovered it, and was violently shaken into a standing position, he found himself in front of a slouching, loose-limbed, beetle-browed tramp whose scowling face made him shiver in his shoes.

“ Now jest you look 'ere, young 'un,” said the tramp threateningly, “ are you one o' them rips as 'ave took possession of these 'ere woods ? Come, now, out with it, and no snivelling ! ”

"I belong to the school, if you please, sir," said Thrifty Miller, trembling for the safety of his money.

"I'll school yer!" exclaimed the tramp, giving Thrifty Miller a sounding slap on his right cheek, and equalising matters by a sounding slap on his left. "What d'yer mean by coming 'ere and spiling my business?"

"Please, sir," whined Thrifty Miller, "I didn't mean to, and I beg your pardon."

"Much good that'll do me. I tramps 'ere a matter of twenty mile to pick up wot falls in my way, and git a honest living, and I find myself knocked over by a lot o' kids. If yer don't make it up to me I'll skin yer alive!"

Out came a great knife with a bright blade, which he snapped open, professionally, by a swift and skilful motion of his hand, to the mortal terror of Thrifty Miller.

"Oh, please don't, sir," he cried, "and I'll do whatever you tell me."

"Yer'd better," said the tramp. "D'yer see that there basket?"

"Yes, sir."

"That basket's got to be filled with fern roots, good measure, by three o'clock this artemnoon. If it ain't I'll make it so 'ot for yer that yer'll wish yer'd never been born. Will yer do it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll take yer word for it; but I'll keep my eye on yer, mind that. Wot's yer name?"

A cunning idea, to secure his own safety, flashed upon Thrifty Miller.

"Tommy Mayple, sir."

"Spell it."

"T—o—m, tom," said Thrifty Miller.

"With a tom," interjected the tramp.

"M—y, me," continued Thrifty Miller.

"With a me, with a tom-me," interjected the tramp as before.

"M—a—y, May."

"With a may, with a me-may, with a tom-me-may."

"P—l—e, pel."

"With a pel, with a may-pel, with a me-may-pel, with a tom-me-may-pel."

Having concluded this game of words the tramp next asked :

"Where's your school?"

"In Gravesend, sir."

"I know all about it. I'm only a-trying of yer to see whether yer'd have the cheek to put me on a wrong lay. Who keeps the school?"

"Miss Peebles, sir."

"K'rect. I'll 'elp myself to a lock of yer 'air, Tommy Mayple."

Thrifty Miller was inclined to regard this as a pleasant jest, but when he felt the tramp's dreadful knife sawing at his hair, and beheld a great lock of it in the tramp's hand, he altered his opinion.

"This'll do to spot yer by," said the tramp, "in case it should come into yer 'ead to throw me over. Take the advice of a honest man, and don't try none of yer games on me. If that there baskit ain't filled with prime fern roots, as'll fetch a bob a dozen in the London markit, afore three o'clock this artemnoon, it'll be a matter of six months' 'ard labour for Tommy Mayple. I've got three witnesses as'll swear yer life away if I 'old up my little finger."

Being volubly inclined, he would have found much more to say to the same effect had he not been startled by a sound of a trumpet.

"Wot's that?" he cried in considerable alarm. "Don't tell me it's a plant, or I'll begin a-skinning of yer!"

"If you please, sir," said Thrifty Miller, "it's Mr. Pennyfold blowing his horn. I must go, if you don't mind."

"Stop a bit," said the tramp, seizing Thrifty Miller by the collar and digging his knuckles into the boy's neck; "who's Mr. Pennyfold, and wot does he mean by a-blowing of 'is 'orn?"

"Please, sir, Mr. Pennyfold's the gentleman who is giving the school-treat."

"Jest to spite me, and spile my little game. A gentleman, is he?"

"Yes, sir."

"A gentleman's a cove as wears a gold watch and chain."

"Mr. Pennyfold does, sir, all over his waistcoat."

"And a dymen ring, and's got lots of tin."

"If you please, sir, Mr. Pennyfold is rolling in money."

"How did he come 'ere?"

"In his carriage."

"In his kerridge! Is that somewhere's 'andy?"

"Yes, sir."

"K'rect. I was a-trying of yer again. 'Ook it now like a flash o' lightning, and if yer don't want to see the inside of a stone jug, fill that there basket brimful of fern roots afore three o'clock this arternoon. Cut it!"

He had not to order twice. Thrifty Miller was too glad to escape.

The children were gradually converging to the appointed spot. Many would have missed their way had it not been that their steps were guided by the sound of the trumpet, which Mr. Pennyfold continued to blow till he was red in the face. Miss Peebles was the last to arrive. She was driving three unruly children before her, with waving hands and arms and energetic sibilations, as though they were poultry, and the sight which greeted her completely took away her breath.

CHAPTER XI

TOMMY MAYPLE GETS INTO DISGRACE.

THERE were forms, arranged in a semi-circle, upon which the children, in obedience to instructions, were seating themselves, with looks which betokened inward disturbance. In front of them, to their left, was a school desk, upon which lay, ominously, a number of lesson books, six "threatening twigs of birch," and a fine supple cane. In front of them, to their right, was a great black-board. Mrs. Pennyfold and the young Pennyfolds were standing in dignified positions, prepared to act the part of gentlefolk who had come to witness an examination of Miss Peebles' pupils. This was the pleasant surprise which Mr. Pennyfold had in store for the kind-hearted little school-mistress and her children.

A school examination in the woods. An original and grand idea, in Mr. Pennyfold's opinion.

What could be healthier and more exhilarating to the minds of the young? What could be more agreeable to them?

But setting aside this pleasant view of the surprise, Mr. Pennyfold regarded it as a kind of moral bath.

The pupils, however, did not view it in that light. They had come to the woods to play, not to be worried and badgered. A holiday meant No Lessons. In their secret minds deep discontent was brooding, but being, as it were, bound hand and foot and given over to the enemy, they did not dare to express their discontent. They sat in gloomy silence, awaiting events.

Miss Peebles was in no better frame of mind. For once in her life she felt inclined to rebel, and if she could have summoned to her aid a morsel of courage she would have remonstrated with Mr. Pennyfold and begged him to forego the examination. But being the most helpless and the timidiest of women, she was compelled, by the very weakness of her nature, to submit. Moreover, was she not also bound hand and foot and given over to the enemy? Had she not allowed Mr. Pennyfold to constitute himself the great Panjandrum of her

school? And then, did not the fate of her pupils rest with him? If she thwarted him, he might order the empty pleasure-van back to Gravesend, and leave her and the children to wander through the wood. Some would probably starve, and some become gipsies, and she, who was responsible for their safety, would be called to account by their parents and the law. There was nothing for it but to submit.

The mockery of it was that Mr. Pennyfold openly declared, before all the children, that it was expressly to gratify her he had devised the surprise, and recalled to her mind the cheerful readiness with which she had acquiesced in his suggestion that they should combine instruction with amusement in their excursion to the woods.

"You doubtless," he said to her with gracious affability, "bear in mind my aphorism that nature supplied a school-room so grand that art cannot equal it."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Peebles faintly; she would have added a "but," had not the word, like Macbeth's Amen, stuck in her throat.

Having thus taken her on his side, and caused the children to regard her as a common enemy, upon whom they determined to revenge themselves in the future, Mr. Pennyfold took the cane from the desk and flourished it in the air. Then he said:

"Now, little boys and girls, we will commence."

He called them up indiscriminately, and put questions to them, historical and otherwise, and propounded problems in weights and measures and simple and compound proportion, and generally confounded them by means of the black-board, upon which he illustrated their ignorance. He did sums in yards of calico, and tons of cheese, and firkins of butter, and in a short time worked the children up into such a state of bewilderment, that they gave random and even flippant answers to the simplest questions.

Miss Peebles was both shocked and humbled. Her pupils were not clever; she had never pretended they were; and it is a sad truth that they learned very little from her, for the sufficient reason that she knew very little herself. She reached the depths of despair when Mr. Pennyfold asked the children to give him an aliquot part of 27. Not one of them could answer, and Miss Peebles mentally wished that the

ground would open and swallow her, she was so fearful that he would ask her to supply him with the information. What *was* an aliquot? For all she knew, it might be a wild beast.

Mr. Pennyfold was not angry at the ignorance displayed by the children. It gave him opportunities of explaining, of exhorting, of dilating upon the lamentable condition of the lower classes, of showing them up and showing himself off. He was really in his glory, and was thoroughly enjoying himself.

The examination cannot be said to have been successful, and, at the conclusion, refreshments were served out to the children, who were then told they might go and play again, and were furthermore informed by Mr. Pennyfold that at a suitable time in the afternoon he would distribute among them the brand-new money he had promised to give them.

"It will be to your advantage," said Mr. Pennyfold, "to keep within sound of the horn. Those who are late will get nothing."

Thrifty Miller separated himself from his companions, and executed the task set him by the tramp. There was no difficulty in obtaining the fern roots; parts of the woods were filled with them, and he was so thoroughly convinced that his movements were being watched by the tramp that, although he saw nothing of that individual, he filled the basket to the brim with the best he could find. He did not take any boy into his confidence; a very close and crafty little fellow indeed was Thrifty Miller.

At precisely five o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Pennyfold, having lunched sumptuously with his family, rose from the Persian rug upon which he had been sitting, for the purpose of stretching himself. A picnic in pleasant woods, on a balmy day, with good wine and food, basking in the sun and in the bosom of one's family, is not to be despised. No wonder, therefore, that Mr. Pennyfold was thoroughly satisfied with the day's proceedings.

He was in the habit of regaling his family with mild platitudes, which in their eyes were gems of the first water, and on this occasion he observed, with reference to the ignorance displayed by the school children, "There is nothing perfect; there are spots on the sun."

"However did pa find that out?" whispered Laurestina Pennyfold to her sister Eugenia.

Mr. Pennyfold cast complacent glances around. His inner man was satisfied; he was at peace with all the world.

"At such moments as this," he said, "one feels desirous of doing good to those beneath one."

"There's the money, pa," said Eugenia, "you are going to give the little boys and girls."

"Thank you, Eugenia," said Mr. Pennyfold, "for reminding me; it is time to distribute the bounty and to get the children back to the pleasure-van. When I reflect upon this day's proceedings I feel that I am of some use to my species."

His wife and children looked up at him in awe. The parts they had played in the school-treat had been insignificantly small, but how could it be otherwise? When Mr. Pennyfold was with them, they were as rush-lights burning round the sun.

He looked about for his trumpet, wherewith, as in the lightness of his heart he expressed it, to summon his merry, merry men. He found it, raised it to his lips, and was about to blow, when his very breath was suspended as it were by sounds of altercation thus expressed:

"Come along now! I've got you, and I mean to keep you. Ah, would you!"

"I know that voice," said Mr. Pennyfold; "it is John the coachman's."

John the coachman's voice it was, and he appeared, dragging by the collar a beetle-browed, scowling-faced ruffian, upon whose back was slung a basket filled with choice fern-roots. None other, indeed, than Thrifty Miller's friend, the tramp.

It is questionable whether the coachman could have coped successfully with the tramp had not the movements of the latter been hampered by the basket of ferns. They tumbled into the presence of Mr. Pennyfold, struggling violently.

"What is all this?" inquired that gentleman, metaphorically putting on his judicial cap. "What is all this, John?"

The coachman was one of those men who never beat about the bush.

"I caught this chap," he said, "making off with three of our silver spoons!"

"What!" cried Mr. Pennyfold, aghast. "With—three—of—my—silver—spoons!"

A pause between each word exhibited the felonious act in its full atrocity.

"Yes, sir," said the coachman, producing the spoons; "here they are, sir. Found 'em sticking out of them ferns in the basket."

"Ferns!" exclaimed Mr. Pennyfold. "Also doubtless stolen."

Up to this point the tramp had not uttered a word, but the accusation touched his pride.

"Stolen!" he cried. "Wot d'yer mean? Do I look like a common prig?"

"Never saw a better likeness," remarked the coachman.

"And them spoons," continued the tramp, "why, yer'd never 'ave set eyes on 'em agin if it hadn't been for me! I sees 'em a-laying on the ground, and I ses to myself, 'If some honest cove don't take 'em to the gentleman as owns 'em, they're as good as in the melting-pot.' Why, I was a-bringing of 'em to yer, and I ses to myself, 'Perhaps I'll git a thrip-penny bit for restoring of 'em.'"

"Tell that," said the coachman, "to the marines."

"It's my opinion," said the tramp, "as this 'ere servant of yourn put 'em by for 'is own eating, and now he rounds on me 'cause I've spilet his little game. I knows a gentleman when I sees 'im, and you're one, and no mistake. I'm a respectable man, that's wot I am, and if yer wants my character, I'll git yer one from my last place."

"Pentonyville," said the coachman.

"There are before us," said Mr. Pennyfold magisterially, "two charges. For the present we will waive the spoons. You say you came honestly by these ferns, which assuredly belong to the lordly owner of this estate. How, then, do they happen to be found in your possession?"

"I bought 'em. That's a good title, ain't it? I paid my own 'ard-earned coin for 'em."

"Of whom did you purchase them?" asked Mr. Pennyfold.

"Of who? Why, of one o' them school-boys—the young rip, for gitting me in trouble!—as yer've give the treat to, and as is rampaging these 'ere woods."

"How do you know that I am giving a treat to the children?"

"Why, he told me, that's wot he did."

"Your knowledge is a colourable defence. Favour me with the name of the delinquent."

"The which?"

"The name of the boy who sold you the ferns."

"That's easy, 'cause I made him give it me. 'Is name's Tommy Mayple. He sed the ferns was 'is'n, and I was green enough to believe 'im. I'll Tommy Mayple 'im if I ketch 'old of 'im!"

"Thomas Mayple," said Mr. Pennyfold, very much scandalized, "shall be made an example of. But, fellow, your story needs verification, and as with respect to my silver spoons you have outraged the law, I give you in custody on that charge. Seize him!"

As a matter of fact, the tramp was already seized by John, the coachman, and the mandate might, therefore, be regarded in the light of one of those dramatic instructions of which "Load him with chains and cast him in the castle moat" may be taken as a fair example. It was not, however, in this instance entirely a figure of speech, for Mr. Pennyfold gave effect to it by advancing with dignified motions and grasping the right arm of the tramp, the coachman having hold of his left. The moment he seized it a change of front occurred in the enemy's position. During the progress of the scene the tramp's efforts had been secretly and industriously directed to freeing himself from the incubus of the basket of ferns, which, hanging at his back, defeated his attempts to regain his freedom. His efforts were rewarded with success, and simultaneously with Mr. Pennyfold laying hands on him, his basket of ferns fell to the ground. Quick as lightning he put his foot behind the coachman's leg, and by a dexterous movement, well known to men of his class, tripped his captor up; and no sooner had the coachman kissed his mother earth than Mr. Pennyfold's legs flew up in the air, and he fell his full length on the broad of his back, in the middle of the remains of the lunch, which but a few minutes since had set him on such excellent terms with his fellowmen.

When, assisted by his coachman, who was first on his feet, he once more stood erect, his appearance was deplorable. His frilled shirt was disordered, his hat was smashed in, his white waistcoat was white no longer. Never in his life had such an indignity been thrust upon him.

He glared around. The tramp had vanished, leaving his basket of ferns behind him. Vanished also, were the silver

spoons, which the tramp had snatched from the coachman's hand as he tripped him up. Mr. Pennyfold's upset had upset his wife and children, who were screaming at the top of their voices.

"Silence, woman! Silence, children! Conduct yourselves with dignity," commanded Mr. Pennyfold. "John, brush me down."

Had Mr. Pennyfold been in his usual serene mood, he would doubtless have expressed his indignation at being treated as if he were one of his own horses; for John, as he brushed his master down, emitted stable sounds, and held his legs, one after the other, as though he were afraid Mr. Pennyfold would suddenly and viciously let fly with his heels. But Mr. Pennyfold's attention was otherwise engrossed; he had obtained possession of his horn, and was blowing loud and discordant blasts thereon. His mental condition was well illustrated by the terrific sounds he produced. The children scrambled in pell-mell from all sides, but still Mr. Pennyfold continued to blow till every little urchin was on the spot.

"Merely on us, sir!" exclaimed Miss Peebles, seeing the state he was in; "what has happened?"

"No matter, madam, no matter," said Mr. Pennyfold, waving her off; "the disgraceful circumstance will be presently explained, and then, madam, perhaps *you* will explain why you gave a false character to that boy there."

He pointed to Tommy Mayple, whose behaviour, it must be confessed, was of a kind to raise his ire; for so comical an appearance did Mr. Pennyfold present, that the lad, who had a keen sense of the ludicrous, could not repress a smile.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Pennyfold majestically, "smile sir, do! You will smile presently on the other side of your mouth. John, separate that young ruffian from his companions, and hold him tight."

Tommy Mayple, in bewilderment, allowed himself to be seized and held, and wondered what he had done. As for Thrifty Miller, when his eyes fell upon the basket of ferns, his bones fairly rattled with fright (he was a very skeleton of a boy), and he turned as white as a ghost; and when Mr. Pennyfold said, "Come here!" his legs would scarcely carry him; he thought his last moments had arrived. But his courage began to return at the unexpected tones of Mr.

Pennyfold's voice. They were kind, they were benign, they were even fatherly.

"You see nothing to laugh at, my boy?"

"N-n-n-no, sir."

"You would not turn and sting the hand that fed you?"

"N-n-n-no, sir."

"This boy," said Mr. Pennyfold, addressing the company generally, "will elevate himself; this boy will rise, and will become an ornament to society. It is not my intention, little boys and girls, to make the innocent suffer for the guilty. I have promised to present you with pieces of new money from the Mint, and I shall keep my promise. There will be one exception, who, if he is not utterly lost to shame, may be brought to confess that honesty is always the best policy. Mrs. Pennyfold, hand me that bag. Thank you. Little boys and girls, you will file before me in slow and regular order, and upon receipt of the donation you will bow or curtsy, as the case may be, and say, 'Thank you, sir,' to me, and 'Thank you, my lady,' to Mrs. Pennyfold."

Mr. Pennyfold opened the bag, and as the children filed past gave to each of them a brand-new penny piece. At the conclusion of the ceremony he addressed them again.

"You will have observed that I have given no donation to your school-fellow, Tommy Mayple. Why do I deprive him of his piece of money and give it to Thrifty Miller? Because he has this day committed an act which horrifies me. I request him to step forward, and gaze, if he can, upon that basket of ferns. Let him go, John."

Tommy Mayple stepped forward and looked at the ferns, and then at Mr. Pennyfold.

"Is it possible," exclaimed Mr. Pennyfold, "that he can gaze upon it without blushing!"

"What have I got to blush for?" demanded Tommy Mayple.

"What have you got to blush for? Do you ask that question with brazen effrontery? I would have spared you had you shown a proper spirit of contrition, but I will now expose you to your fellow-pupils. These ferns are stolen ferns, and Tommy Mayple did it."

"I didn't!" cried Tommy Mayple.

"It will not avail you, sir. Your accomplice confessed, and made a clean breast of it before he escaped. I shall consider

what is best to be done with you. Is any boy or girl in a position to come forward as a witness against him?"

There was perfect silence; not a child moved; and it must be said, although they were overwhelmed at the revelation of Tommy Mayple's wickedness, that they were all sorry for him—with the exception of Thrifty Miller.

"In the absence of witnesses," continued Mr. Pennyfold, "and there being no likelihood of our being able to arrest his accomplice, this wretched youth will probably escape the consequences of his crime. Let him ponder on it, and, if it is not too late, let him resolve to reform and become an honest boy for the future. Whether he does so or not, I, for my part, will have nothing more to do with him. I wash my hands of Thomas Mayple."

All merriment was at an end; a dark cloud rested upon the day's enjoyment, and the children looked at Tommy Mayple in doubt and fear. He was very pale, and did not attempt to mix with them. It was only when poor little Miss Peebles drew him aside, and said to him mournfully: "O, Tommy, Tommy; how could you—how could you?" that he exclaimed passionately:

"If it was the last word I ever had to speak, ma'am, I didn't do it!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE STOLEN TREASURE.

THROUGH the dark woods crept Michael Featherstone. There was no moon, and the only sounds which broke the pervading stillness were the rustling of the leaves, the swaying of slender trees and branches, and the stealthy tread of Michael Featherstone's footsteps. Ever and anon he paused, now in caution, now in fear, and peered into the gloom, creating therein impalpable shapes which would have caused him to fly in terror from the road he was traversing had not his reason and his strong will conquered the delusions. He had had a tiring and exhausting day—a day which seemed as if it would never come to an end—but he experienced no sense of fatigue. No compunctions oppressed him with respect to the wrong he was meditating and had resolved to commit; no compassion for the benefactor whom he had driven to madness, nor for the young man whose life he had ruined, caused him to falter on his way. The lust of gold was in his soul, and remorse, sin-laden as it was, lay dormant for awhile. What chiefly weighed upon him was fear for his own safety and for the successful execution of the task upon which he was engaged.

During the day he had secreted a pick and shovel, which he had bought of a hedger and ditcher for a couple of shillings, and he was now proceeding to the spot in which he had concealed them. His progress was slow, and he silently congratulated himself that many hours of darkness must elapse before daylight dawned. He found the tools he had purchased, and then he turned in the direction of the hidden treasure.

It was about a mile from the spot in which he had placed the pick and shovel, and he calculated that it would take him nearly an hour to reach it. By that time it would be one o'clock. He struck a match and looked at his watch. It was midnight; thus far he had not wasted a minute. As he threw the lighted match on the ground, he saw two gleaming eyes in the grass which for a moment appalled him. He laughed aloud at the

fancy, and dug his heels into the grass to stamp it out. He had prepared himself for such imaginary terrors, and with strange sophistry had twisted them into a justification of his wrong-doing.

"I shall have paid for the money," he thought; "it is well earned, and belongs to me by right, as a set-off against the trouble and the danger."

Of one possible phase of the adventure he never lost sight; that he might be watched and tracked by a person who had found James Whitelock's Confession. It was not probable; it was indeed scarcely possible; and he was prepared for it up to the point of discovery. Beyond that point he would not allow his thoughts to travel. Resolutely he beat them back, but he grasped his pick with ferocious determination, and once he raised it and struck at a tree with cruel force. Who crossed his path would have to take the consequences. What those consequences were, and to what fearful goal they might lead him, he refused, with set teeth, to consider. It was to be left to accident; he would not take upon himself the responsibility of deciding anything that might be construed into violence. Thus did he endeavour to purge himself from possible blood-guiltiness.

In the course of an hour he arrived at the old chestnut tree, beneath the overhanging branches of which the treasure was buried. Although no actual obstacles had presented themselves to arrest his progress, he had been beset by disturbing visions which took the shape of moving shadows mysteriously threatening him, of monstrous forms in the near distance, of spirit faces looking down upon him from the trees, of giant hands stretched forth to seize him. He could not divest himself of these terrors, but he fought his way through them; neither they nor the accusing voices he heard in the sobbing wind, which was increasing in strength, could divert him from his purpose.

At length the supreme moment had arrived. In darkness and solitude he was about to test the truth of James Whitelock's Confession.

He had provided himself with a small dark lantern, which he now lighted. It was a difficult matter, for the wind continued to rise. "There will be rain before the night is over," he muttered. "All the better. The heavier it falls, the more surely will it efface all traces of unusual disorder." His lantern

being lighted, he peered round. No soul was near ; he was so far safe.

He counted the arched branches of the tree, and tying a piece of cord to the centre branch, carried it to the trunk, and affixed it there by means of a nail. Then with his pick he dug a straight line to the trunk, and releasing the cord, folded it into two equal lengths, and thus arrived at the exact spot indicated in the Confession. Raising his pick, he dug it deep into the earth. As he did so he was startled by a cold touch upon his hand ; it was merely a spot of rain, and he wiped it off with the air of a braggart. Then he set to work in earnest. With the light of the lamp to assist him, he dug for half an hour without pausing. It was work to which he had never been accustomed, but he threw so desperate an energy into it that he accomplished more than a skilful digger would have done in double the time ; already he had cleared a space of about three feet square by two deep. So engrossed was he in his task that he scarcely noticed the rain which was now beginning to fall. The full strength of the storm, however, was not yet upon him. With no more delay than was necessary for the recovery of his spent breath, he resumed his labour, and by two o'clock stood in the shaft at a depth of four feet from the surface of the earth. Before he reached this depth he allowed his impatience to obtain the mastery over him. Meeting with no signs of the box in which the bank-notes were said to be deposited, he muttered, with passionate force, "If you have played me a trick, James Whitelock, I'll make it the worst day's work you have ever done. You shall find how dangerous it is to play with an edged tool like Michael Featherstone." He was not to be disappointed, however, nor had he long to wait for the realisation of his hopes. His pick struck upon a wooden surface. With a loud cry he fell upon his knees, and tore the earth with his nails, and soon held in his hands the box described in the Confession. Had his life depended upon it, he could not at that moment have restrained the open expression of his exultation.

"At last, at last," he cried, "fortune is mine, and I am a made man ! What would you give, Warren Earnshaw, to be here at this moment ? Who is the gentleman now, you or I ? You are properly punished for your pride and arrogance. You hated me always, and took pains to make me aware of it.

Shall I crawl at your feet and forget your insolence? Shall I forget your blows and your threats, and the pains you were about to take to put me in a felon's dock? A likely thing, indeed! You flung my father's disgrace in my face, did you? I shall live to see you lower than he was, viler than he was. Why, my fine gentleman, you have played into my hands. Had you not informed me this afternoon that your father did not know the numbers of the notes he recovered for the bank—no, not for the bank; for me!—I might well have had some fear in changing them. But with this knowledge I am absolutely safe. Who can touch me—who? A little caution—nothing more is needed, and it shall be exercised. As for you, James Whitelock, I know how to silence you. How mistaken in me you are if you expect me ever to admit that I found the treasure you buried! You have also taught me a lesson, and I shall know how to profit by it."

Here a sudden apprehension overcame him. He had not yet assured himself that the notes were in the box. He hastily ripped up the canvas and prized the lid with his pocket-knife. There, beneath a heap of shavings, lay the bank-notes for four thousand pounds. He carefully extracted them, and nailed up the box, and repaired as well as he could the ripped canvas in which it was wrapped. This done, he replaced the box at the bottom of the shaft, and shovelled back the earth, scattering and stamping the dead leaves above it. The rain, which was now falling heavily, and the wind, which had risen to a gale, did not impede him. The vivid lightning flashed around him, and the thunder rolled through the forest. He was grateful for the storm, knowing that any disturbance of the surface of the ground would certainly be ascribed to its violence.

"Now you, James Whitelock, or any man," he thought, "may come here and dig for treasure. I wish you joy of what you will find."

As he stepped out of the arch a flash of lightning almost blinded him; it struck the forked branches of the old tree, and tore them from the trunk. Had Michael Featherstone delayed another moment he would have been lying dead upon the spot. Somewhat awed by his escape, and impiously ascribing it to his good luck, he made his way slowly through the woods, and when he had gone a mile he flung away his pick and shovel. That done, he passed through the storm, safe and unhurt, hugging the stolen treasure to his breast.

CHAPTER XIII.

DREAMS.

AND while Michael Featherstone proceeds upon his guilty way, to the doom which shall fall upon him in the years to come, Warren Earnshaw is dreaming of a happy future with Mary Graham. Deep in his soul have sunk the beautiful lessons she has taught him, and he dreams that his father, with reason restored, is living with them in their modest home, in which faith, and hope, and love are the guiding stars. Wealth does not fall to his share : he is poor always, but he is contented, for the unmerited shame which was thrust upon him is removed, and men look on him with respect ; and by his side, her tender eyes shining on him, walks the true and faithful woman whose prayers and holy influence purify his soul, and keep him in the path which, lighted by God's lamps, leads to eternity.

And Mary Graham sleeps with a smile upon her lips. More earnestly than ever has she prayed to-night for the beloved one in whose cause she would gladly yield her life. Sweet messages come to her in her dreams, and she is happy. The present is peaceful, the future bright, and heaven is on their side.

And Tommy Mayple tosses about and clenches his fists, and sobs at the false accusation which lies at his door ; and in the midst of his grief he laughs aloud at Mr. Pennyfold's comical appearance. But he is punished for his levity, for an officer of the law suddenly appears and beckons him to prison.

Miss Peebles' dreams are synonymous. Mr. Pennyfold appears to her in the shape of a giant policeman, dragging Tommy Mayple along, with manacles on his wrists, while she wrings her hands and cries :

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy ! how could you : how could you ?"

Mr. Pennyfold dreams not. He sleeps the sleep of the just, and his rest is not disturbed by fancies.

Thrifty Miller rolls ecstatically in his bed. In his dreams he is rolling in money, and everybody is afraid of him and bowing to him.

Peter Lamb dreams of his old mother. She is not dead, but is sailing with him over blue seas, and they are standing on the deck of the toy ship, looking at a cottage and a revolving windmill, while the musical-box is playing "Home, Sweet Home."

The old church bells are softly pealing, and Philip, the cripple-student, dreams that he has written a book, and that all the world is reading it. It is a book in which noble thought has found expression, and men are made the better for it. He has ranged himself on the side of suffering humanity, and his soul is glad.

Thus on the tide of time glide they all into the future.

THE END OF THE FIRST PART.

PART THE SECOND.

THE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

MICHAEL FEATHERSTONE, THE PROSPEROUS SPECULATOR.

SEVEN years have passed, and my story re-opens in a narrow street, leading out of the main arteries of poorer London, East End way, where Warren Earnshaw and his wife Mary are living a life of humbleness and poverty, with Grandfather Earnshaw and their twin children, Philippa and Raymond.

Within a mile of the rooms occupied by the Earnshaws resided also the man Michael Featherstone, whose false evidence had ruined his benefactor. He was reputed to be very rich ; he was undoubtedly very prosperous. He was a speculator in house property, and being shrewd, close, unscrupulous, and amazingly clever in driving hard bargains, and having, moreover, a store of ready-money at command, his speculations were wonderfully successful. He was without kith or kin, and his habits were penurious. His sole aim in life appeared to be to grow richer and richer—to what end, being a lonely man, without one single link of love to bind him to his fellows, he did not stop to inquire. The pleasure of possession was sufficient for him, as it is for many over whose soul is cast the fatal glamour of gold.

He had in his employ three persons to whom, be sure, he paid the barest pittance, keeping them well under his thumb, as he was in the habit of expressing himself with respect to those with whom he had dealings. At first, when he commenced speculating in rents, he had but one servant, James Whitelock, a man who had met with a severe accident which

had completely paralysed his right side and limbs. Some other connection than that of master and servant united these men, but its nature was not disclosed. Despite his affliction, James Whitelock was useful to Michael Featherstone. In the collection of rents due to his employer he was merciless ; relentlessly he stood by his bond, and many a poor family had he turned despairingly into the streets. His own pitiable condition was an added terror to those whom he oppressed under the shadow of the law ; instead of inspiring him with pity for others, it rendered him pitiless, and thus there was a certain ruthless fitness in his being agent to a man who had but one passion—gold !

When Michael Featherstone's speculations grew more extensive, he took into his employ two clerks, with whom we are already acquainted—Thrifty Miller and Thomas Mayple. As young men, they had come to London to seek their fortune, and had settled down to it, whether for good or ill, in humble association with Michael Featherstone. The great recommendation in his eyes was that they were both good at figures, Thomas Mayple being by far the more skilful of the two. Thrifty Miller was a smaller and meaner edition of Michael Featherstone, and a faithful estimate of the comrades may be gathered from what follows.

The wages these two young men received were barely sufficient to pay for board and lodging, and Thomas Mayple spent every penny of his, and was, moreover, in ever-increasing debt to his once schoolmate, thrifty in name and thrifty in nature. The mystery was how Thrifty Miller managed to save, but save he did by hook or crook ; living on a crust, which he would rather beg than buy. An explanation is partly afforded in the fact that the two young men lodged together in one room, and that Thrifty Miller frequently shared Thomas Mayple's meal, never by any chance returning the compliment by offering to stand treat himself. Towards the end of each week the more generous of these companions was compelled to borrow a few pence of the more niggardly, to keep body and soul together. These loans were acknowledged by Thomas Mayple in paper obligations, most carefully drawn out by Thrifty Miller, commencing with the words : " I Promise to Pay on demand," or " One Month after date I Promise to pay " such and such sums ; the interest added by the lender being of such usurious magni-

tude that it would have excited the envy and the admiration of all the villainous money-lenders who grow fat upon human simplicity and credulity. From time to time as they fell due, or when demand was made by Thrifty Miller, these paper obligations were renewed with more interest added, until Thomas Mayple owed his comrade a sum so vast, that, under ordinary circumstances, he could not hope to repay it within the biblical term of a man's existence. The very clothes he stood upright in belonged to Thrifty Miller, who purchased them of him, piece by piece, or took them for interest due, and lent them back at so much a week for boots, so much a week for shirt, so much a week for trousers, waistcoat, and coat, and always with interest added. It is doubtful whether Thomas Mayple could blow his own nose without it costing him something. Had Thrifty Miller been so inclined, he could have legally stripped his spendthrift friend, and sent him stark naked into the world. His constant advice and words of council were proof of the goodness of his intentions. "You really must be more careful, Tom, you really must, or you will come to grief." "Take care of your farthings, Tom, and your pounds will take care of themselves." "Why did you buy that quarter of a pound of ham for supper last night? It was very nice, and I enjoyed it; but it was too extravagant—really too extravagant." "When you lend money to anyone, Tom, always be sure that you have good security for it." What could be more disinterested? Thrifty Miller was for ever throwing these pearls at his friend, and warning him of the sword that hung over his head.

Did this trouble Thomas Mayple? Not a whit. Easy, good-natured, generous, and careless, he cared not for to-morrow, and in the teeth of his own complicated involvements, he would often borrow a penny to give to a beggar in the streets. His state was undoubtedly the happier of the two—by which declaration it is not intended to set him up as an example worthy of imitation. Yet am I sometimes in my heart secretly glad that there are reprobates in the world who do not too tenaciously hug to their breasts the maxim that charity begins and ends at home. Perhaps it is because I have heard it severely distilled from the lips of rich men living in hotbeds of luxury, while misery and desolation stare them daily in the face.

Many were the shifts Thrifty Miller resorted to in those days

to appease the cravings of his stomach, so that he might save a penny. With plenty of money in his pocket he would walk in the evening to Covent Garden market, and hunt among the discarded garbage for fruit which it would have been an offence against the law to sell. Early in the morning he would prowls about Houndsditch and St. Mary Axe, and turn over the sweepings of the wholesale warehouses, which lay in the gutters waiting for the scavenger's cart, on the chance of finding a stray pencil or a few pens. He frequently found such treasures, and converted them into money.

A model of industry he, with figures, figures, figures, in pounds, shillings, and pence, in his heart and in his brain, from morn to night and from night to morn. Penurious as Michael Featherstone was, he was a prince in comparison with this young man, who intended, willy nilly, to die a rich man.

After a time he began in his spare moments to trade on his own account. He started as a tallyman, confining his operations, in the first place, to weak, foolish women, whom he cajoled into the purchase of ribbons, dress pieces, chimney ornaments, and gilt rings and chains, for which they paid at so much a week, interest being added when they were in arrears. In the collection of these dues he employed Thomas Mayple, so they both of them served two masters at one time. Thomas Mayple served Thrifty Miller and Michael Featherstone. Thrifty Miller served Michael Featherstone and himself. Starting on the lowest rung of the ladder, he distanced many a better man in that mad race which nine out of every ten are running, without thought of the common goal at which all must stop. His ambition even reached the height of starting a bank. His office was the parlour of a small house, for which he paid a rental of four shillings a week. Across the one window of this room was stretched a wire blind upon which was painted: "The Mutual Self-Confidence Bank. Secretary, Thomas Mayple, Esq." He had thousands of bills printed and circulated, announcing that the Mutual Self-Confidence Bank was ready to make Advances and issue Loans of from Five Shillings upwards, at a Moderate Rate of Interest, to Working Men, Tradesmen, and others, upon Personal Security; that the Advances could be repaid by Easy Instalments, weekly, fortnightly, or monthly, at the Option of the Borrower; that the Utmost Secrecy might be relied upon; that the Office Hours

were from 8 to 10 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings; and that all communications were to be addressed to the Secretary, Thomas Mayple, Esq. Thrifty Miller had this easy-natured factotum as completely in his power as if he were a fish wriggling on a hook. Flies hovered round the web of the Self-Confidence, and some were caught. Thrifty Miller's ambition bade fair to be satisfied. More will be heard of his doings. Return we now to Michael Featherstone.

With capital henchmen at his beck and call, his money accumulating with every beat of the pulse which marks the record from the cradle to the grave, he extended his sphere of operations, and began to build houses on freehold land. Of one of his pieces of property he made a personal memorial, by calling it Featherstone Buildings. It was a *cul de sac*, with a frontage to a main road, a pair of iron gates guarding its entrance. There were ten two-storey houses on each side of Featherstone Buildings, numbered from 1 to 20, and one imposing house, No. 21, four stories in height, at the end. It was this building which blocked up the thoroughfare. In front of each house, which was approached by two steps, was a small garden, enclosed by wooden palings and a small wooden gate, painted green. A janitor was appointed, who lived in No. 1, and whose duty it was to attend to the iron gates which shut Featherstone Buildings from the outer world. None but tenants and their friends were allowed upon this miniature estate. From the tenant of each house the janitor, who was an old gardener, received a weekly stipend of sixpence, in return for which he kept the little bits of garden in trim; and as many of their tenants really took pride in their houses, and spent a few pence occasionally on seeds and flowers, Featherstone Buildings became quite an institution in the neighbourhood by reason of its rural appearance. It was truly an oasis in the squalid East, and the youth of the adjacent thoroughfares—who, in the matter of clothes, were qualified to serve in Falstaff's ragged regiment—used to peep through the gates and feast their eyes upon the flowers which struggled into existence there. In the apartments on the top floor of No. 21, Featherstone Buildings, lived Michael Featherstone himself; and at that time, Warren Earnshaw, his wife, father, and twin-children, then eighteen months old, lived together within a mile of the man who had ruined them.

CHAPTER II.

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HARD TIMES.

WARREN held a situation as clerk in a wholesale tea warehouse, on a weekly wage of twenty-five shillings, and though Mary, in her leisure moments did a little lacework, the cares of the humble home, no less than Warren's insistence that she should not over-work herself, prevented her from earning any great sum. Their united weekly earnings seldom exceeded thirty shillings, upon which it was no easy matter to make both ends meet, as the saying is. Mary, however, was a careful housekeeper, and she not only successfully solved the problem, but managed to maintain an air of respectability which lifted the little family above the level of its neighbours. A fair share of happiness was enjoyed in this modest home, and if, as was frequently the case, Warren's face grew clouded when he thought of the future, Mary's smiles and unremitting tenderness never failed to cheer him. So things went on, until, in an evil hour, Michael Featherstone and the Earnshaws met.

Father and son, in pursuance of their usual custom when the weather was fine, were walking together on a summer evening, while Mary put the children to bed and prepared the frugal supper. Generally they walked to the west of the City, but on this evening they turned eastward, in the direction of Featherstone Buildings. They had never heard of the existence of such a place, and Warren would have passed on without observing it, had not his father suddenly stopped before the iron gates, over which was painted in conspicuous letters the name of the little estate. Looking back to see what had attracted his father's attention, Warren's eyes fell upon the words.

"See, Warren, see," whispered the old man, pointing upwards, "Featherstone Buildings!"

His face was white; Warren's also. The memories recalled by the name of Featherstone were very bitter.

Warren was the first to recover himself; he feared the effect of any violent emotion on his father's mind.

"Come," he said, laying his hand on his father's arm, "we must think of getting home. Mary will be anxious about us."

The old man would not move. He stood with his head bent forward gazing on a figure which was advancing towards them up the narrow path between the houses. The gate opened, and Michael Featherstone walked out and confronted his benefactor.

No word was spoken as they gazed upon each other. Michael Featherstone's eyes travelled from the father to the son, and a smile of deep meaning came to his lips. It expressed the triumph of a cruel revenge. It seemed to say, "Who is the gentleman now, Mr. Warren Earnshaw, you or I?"

Profoundly agitated, but still retaining his outward self-possession, Warren linked his father's arm in his, and forcibly took him from the spot. As he turned his back upon his enemy he heard a laugh which thrilled through his veins, and almost broke down the barrier of self-restraint; but even then he controlled himself by a strong effort of will, and the incident would have come to an end had not Michael Featherstone chosen otherwise. He stepped before Mr. Earnshaw and Warren, and in an insolent tone demanded to know why they were prowling about his property.

"The streets are free," said Warren. "We came here by accident. Stand aside."

"The streets are free to honest men," retorted Michael Featherstone.

"You villain!" said Warren in a low tone, stepping in advance of his father, so that he should be heard only by the man he addressed. "What is your motive in trying to provoke me? Have you not worked evil enough, and are you not yet content?"

"For vagabonds and bank robbers," continued Michael Featherstone, "prisons are built. Take care you don't get inside one. Ah! you may glare and work your lips; times are changed, Mr. Warren Earnshaw. Your words are feather-weights by the side of mine. There is a policeman on the opposite side of the road, who knows that I am a gentleman and a man of standing. I have but to beckon to him, and charge you with loitering suspiciously about my property, and in addition with threatening me, and you would make acquaintance with prison walls. A fine story to get into the newspapers, spiced with certain particulars of the past, of which you must

be very proud. I don't forget your insults, or your blows, or your attempts to ruin me, and I have half a mind to repay you now for all. It is in my power to do so, but I will take pity on you, only I warn you to be careful. As for the old man, I will do more than pity him—I will be charitable to him. From some feeling which I have no doubt he would call philanthropy, but which I know to be self-interest, he took me into his service when I was a poor boy. I dare say you remember how you threw my misfortunes in my teeth, but I will say of your father that he never did so; he was far too sly. Here, old man."

He held out a shilling, and before Warren could interpose his father accepted it.

"From Michael Featherstone!" said the old man childishly, turning the shilling over in his hand. "I used to give *him* shillings! It is Michael Featherstone, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Michael Featherstone. "I am glad you have sense enough left to recognise me."

"Oh, yes, I recognise you, Michael Featherstone. I do not forget everything, not everything."

"That's a merey," said Michael Featherstone tauntingly. "You don't appear to be very rich, Mr. Earnshaw."

"Rich!" exclaimed the old man, with a disturbed look. "No. I was once, but now we are poor, are we not, Warren? Would you believe, Michael, that my boy here works from morning to night, and gets no more than five-and-twenty shillings a-week? Nay, Warren, I *will* speak to Michael, though I'll not keep his shilling. Take it back, Michael, take it back. If you wish to acknowledge what I did for you it must be with something more than a shilling. Warren, my boy, when I first saw Michael he was hungry, and in rags. He told me he had not tasted food for a whole day. I was truly sorry for him, and I was glad it was in my power to help him. Yes, he was as poor as we are now. Who would have thought he would have grown to be a gentleman? Rings and a gold chain! see, Warren. You are rich, eh, Michael?"

"I could buy up a thousand such as you," said Michael Featherstone—he had prolonged the interview because he saw that Warren was suffering—"and yet have my thousands a year."

"It is wonderful, wonderful, and all from nothing? Thousands a year, after buying us up! What was that story you told me

once, Warren, against Michael, about his robbing me? Michael," he said, laying his fingers on Michael Featherstone's sleeve, and looking up into his face, "how did you make your money?"

This question startled and disconcerted Michael Featherstone. He shook off the old man, and said to Warren :

"You had best take the old fool home ; and I advise you both to keep out of my way."

"No, no, Michael," said Mr. Earnshaw, "now that I know where you live I shall come and see you again. I want you to tell me how you made your money. He is gone, Warren, and without even shaking hands !"

"God forbid," said Warren, "that your hands should ever meet ! Let us hasten home to Mary."

"Yes, Warren, yes. To our dear Mary. Do you know, my boy, I have sometimes thought she is working too hard. What with nursing the dear children, and cooking for all of us, and keeping the rooms sweet and clean, she has more than her hands full. Poor Mary ! She never complains, Warren, but smiles and sings as she goes about her work, though I know she is overtasked. That is the way she tries to hide it from us. She ought to have a servant to assist her."

"We can't afford it, father," said Warren, with an aching heart.

"We ought to be able to afford it," said Mr. Earnshaw, "for Mary's sake. When Michael Featherstone tells me how he has made his money I'll see if I can't make some the same way. Warren, my boy, you, too, look pale and careworn. You ought to have a holiday. Now, if I had money I could take you all to the sea-side for a couple of months. That would be a great happiness, would it not?"

"It would be, father ; but it is worse than useless talking of it ; it only frets one's heart."

"I must think—I must think ! There *must* be a way of making money, else that ragged boy, Michael, could not have grown rich. It isn't much we want, Warren."

"More than we are ever likely to get. Father, we must make the best of things."

"That is right, Warren, quite right," said Mr. Earnshaw, slowly rubbing his forehead ; "but still I must think, for our dear girl's sake. She does so much for us, Warren ! Can we do nothing for her in return ? I was clever once ; I must con-

trive to get it back, so that we may grow rich, like Michael Featherstone. Poor Mary!—poor Mary!”

That night, when the old man and the children were asleep Warren drew Mary to him, and said :

“Mary, you are overworking yourself.”

“Whoever has put that foolish idea into your head?” exclaimed Mary, with one of her brightest looks.

“Father has noticed it for a long time past, and it is troubling him; while I, selfish and careless, have never given it a thought.”

“Warren dear,” said Mary, with grave sweetness, “you do yourself a great injustice. How often have you told me that you wished it were in your power to keep a servant for me, and how often and often have you helped me in a hundred kind and unselfish ways! Why, Warren, do you forget, when our dear babies were born, that you did nearly all the cooking, and that for more than two weeks you used to feed me? Oh, my darling, how happy it used to make me to hear your footsteps on the stairs, and how grateful I used to be, and am, to God for having given you to me! Did you not sacrifice your dinner-hour every day, and run home here from the office—I am sure it must be a mile, dear—so that you might cut up my dinner for me, knowing what delight it gave me to be petted and to be fed from your hands? My cup of joy was very full, and is, my darling! No woman in all the wide world, though she were as rich as a queen, ever tasted sweeter happiness than I have drawn from your love. When you speak of being selfish and careless towards me, I feel as if I were ungrateful in not taking more pains to show you how deeply I appreciate your kindness and goodness to me. Let us take a peep at our babies, Warren. Are they not beautiful? Kiss them, dear—softly, softly! When violets began to grow I think God must have pressed them to babies’ lips. Oh, Warren, we ought to be very grateful! I am so happy that I am almost afraid. Are not their little hands wonderful? Would it be believed that ours were ever so small and soft? Philippa’s dimple is growing more and more like mine every day; you have no idea how she observes. Raymond, too; he understands every word you say to him. His hair is getting darker—it will be as dark as yours. Don’t mind my crying, dear; my heart is so full of joy that it is overflowing!”

* * * * *

Three months afterwards she had need for all her strength, for all her cheerfulness, for all the powers of her devoted nature. Warren had been ailing for some time, and she had urged him to ask his employers for a week's holiday, so that he could go into the country, and rest; but she could not persuade him. Even when she showed him a sovereign which she had earned and saved for him he would not consent. All that she could do was to give him the medicine of a cheerful home; but he grew paler and weaker in spite of all her efforts. During this period she saw him gaze frequently upon his father, with a meaning in his eyes that she could not read; and when she asked him if he had any new cause for anxiety, he bade her not vex herself with foolish fancies.

One day he came home earlier than usual, and, leaning against the shelf, said :

"Mary, they have given me a holiday at the office."

"Oh, I am so glad!" she cried. "Now you must really go into the country—I must play the tyrant, and insist upon it. My sovereign has grown into thirty shillings, and I think I can sell something to make it into two pounds. Ah! my dear, if I only had a fortune to give you—if one of my mother's old friends would only send me a present of fifty sovereigns! But you will be able to manage nicely with two pounds. You shall go to the seaside for a whole week."

"I have a longer holiday than that, Mary."

An unaccustomed note in his voice caused her to regard him more attentively. His face was colourless, and he was swaying to and fro. She flew to his side, but she was not strong enough to hold his sinking form, which the next moment lay motionless on the ground. She did not faint or cry. Unaided, she succeeded in raising him on to the bed, and after bathing his face—with what convulsive joy did she hail the faint beating of his heart!—she ran out for a doctor.

"Weakness," said the doctor, "and perhaps over-anxiety. Good food, bracing air, and rest will pull him round."

But Warren was unable to leave his bed for a month, and in this interval Mary and his father learnt that he had been suddenly dismissed from his office. No definite reason was given by his employers for the step, and he could only account for it by the circumstance that on the day before he was dis-

charged he saw Michael Featherstone and the senior member of the firm walking together.

"I owe my dismissal," said Warren, "to that bitter enemy. I asked my employers whether there was anything wrong in my accounts. No, they answered, they had discovered nothing wrong. Had I been in any way neglectful of my duties? No, they had nothing to complain of in that respect. Were the duties I performed no longer necessary? They were necessary, was the answer, and another man would be employed in my place. 'In simple justice,' I said, 'tell me why you discharge me as you would an unfaithful servant?' They would give me no satisfaction; they said they regretted the necessity, but that I must go. That is all, except that, in my belief, Michael Featherstone will not rest satisfied till he has hunted me into my grave. For myself I care not; but you, Mary, and our children—what is to become of you?"

"God will not desert us, dear," said Mary. "When you get strong you will obtain another situation. Only you must not lose courage, darling. You must say to yourself, 'I will not despair; I will not, I will not, because of those I love, and who love me with all their hearts and souls!' Yes, Warren, you must say that, and think that. All will come right, dear; bright days are in store for us."

"Dear woman! I will do my best. But, Mary, I would have you bear in mind what I now say. Whatever occurs, never believe that I have been tempted into wrong-doing. No conscious sin lies, nor shall ever lie, at my door. Rather than that, I would pray for death to overtake me. Not only love, but reverence for you—"

"Hush, Warren, hush!" she said, placing her hand on his lips.

"I must say what is in my mind. It seems to me that I love you with more than human love; your very name is a charm against evil temptations; and this feeling is so deeply rooted in my heart that I am armed to bear any suffering, however great, rather than be the cause of bringing shame and dishonour upon us. But I cannot help turning faint sometimes at the prospect before us. Kiss me, dear, and let me go to sleep. I shall wake up stronger and better for this conversation."

Very rarely did Mr. Earnshaw have lucid intervals, but on

that night he awoke with his senses fully restored for an hour or so. As he thought of the past, heavy tears rolled down his face, and he suffered an anguish so exquisite that it was a mercy when he relapsed into a state of mental helplessness. He did not sob loudly; he was fearful of disturbing the family; and the only words which escaped his overcharged heart were :

“Oh, my son, my son! Better I had died when you were born than have brought this misery into your life!”

In a month Warren was strong enough to rise from his bed and seek employment. He was not successful in obtaining it; only an occasional day's work now and then fell to his share. And still, as they sank into deeper and deeper poverty, Mary worked for the home with unremitting cheerfulness, and had ever a tender smile and cheerful words for him.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAGEDY OF FEATHERSTONE.

On the night of November 22nd Mary was sitting in her room sewing. Her children were asleep; Warren and his father were absent, as she supposed, in each other's company. Warren was still out of regular employment, although he had left no stone unturned to obtain it. Scores of fruitless journeys had he made in answer to advertisements, and scarcely a day passed in which he did not write at least half a-dozen letters applying for situations, delivering them personally, without considering the distance, to save the penny postage which each would otherwise have cost. Night and day his mind was burdened by oppressive thought. Sleep had deserted him, and sometimes he feared that he would lose his reason as his father had done. Work, work, that was all he wanted, and he was ready to slave sixteen hours out of the twenty-four to provide bread for his children. But work was denied him, and bone and muscle were wasting to a desperate state of weakness in the cruel struggle.

At a little past ten he returned home. Mary heard his step, and opened the door to greet him with a kiss.

"Where have you been, dear?"

"I saw an advertisement in an evening paper," he answered wearily, "for a clerk in a night auctioneer's office, and I thought I would go at once and apply for it, fearing that to-morrow might be too late."

"Yes, dear."

"It is three miles away," continued Warren, "and the auctioneer was selling when I arrived, so I had to wait till the sale was over. Then I was told that the situation was filled up. The salary was twelve shillings a week, and the auctioneer said he had received three hundred and forty letters applying for it."

"Never mind, dear," said Mary, with sweet cheerfulness and resignation, "you will be more successful presently."

He sighed and looked around.

"Was he not with you?" she asked in surprise.

"No," he answered; "I went out alone, you know."

"Yes, Warren, and he followed immediately after, with the intention of accompanying you, I supposed."

"He did not accompany me; I have seen nothing of him. He must have been away three hours."

"Yes, it is quite three hours ago since he went out."

They were both alarmed at the old man's absence.

"You have no idea where he has gone, Mary?"

"No, Warren."

"Did he say nothing before he left? Did he mention any name or place?"

"No; but now I think of it, he *did* say something strange."

"What was it?"

"He said he was going to discover a great secret—how to make all our fortunes; and that after this night we should never be pinched for money. '*We will build houses,*' he said. He spoke in so glad a tone that I could not help nodding and smiling at him; he has said so many strange things lately that I attached no importance to this. Then he followed you, to join you, I thought."

Warren started up.

"I must go and find him, Mary. It is not safe for him to be out alone at this time of night."

He left her hurriedly, and in about an hour returned with his father. Their countenances bore the impress of some powerful agitation, and Mary forbore to question her husband in the presence of the old man. When he retired to rest, she asked Warren where he had found his father; but Warren answered her evasively, and she forbore to press him.

At two o'clock in the morning Mary was awakened by a movement in the room, and saw her husband standing dressed by the bed.

"Father has gone out," he said. "When we return do not ask him any questions. I am afraid he has one of his bad attacks on him."

They returned in the early morning, both very much exhausted, and Mary, alarmed for the old man's peace of mind, deemed it prudent to be silent on the subject of their strange wanderings.

* * * * *

Newspaper Extract, November 24th, 1868.

“A mysterious and tragic discovery was made yesterday morning at No. 21, Featherstone Buildings, a double row of houses situated in Whitechapel, in the East-end of London. The house consists of four stories, and is let out to lodgers. The ground-floor is occupied by a mason and his family, of the name of Barwick; the second-floor is in the possession of two sisters, both widows, and their children; the third-floor is vacant, new lodgers being expected at the end of the week; and on the fourth-floor lived Mr. Michael Featherstone, the gentleman who owned the buildings and a great deal of other property in the neighbourhood.

“Featherstone Buildings consist of twenty-one houses in a blind thoroughfare, access to which is obtained through a gate, which is under the control of a janitor, Thomas Parkins, who lives in No. 1, and performs various services on the estate. Among these was the duty of calling his employer at half-past seven every morning, and carrying into the bedroom a jug of tea. Mr. Featherstone lived entirely alone, and did not employ a housekeeper, a circumstance which points to the fact of his being penurious in his habits. On the night preceding the tragic discovery, the janitor, who had been on a visit to a married daughter, did not return to his lodgings till five minutes past eleven o'clock; he observed nothing strange, and at twelve o'clock he went to bed. During the interval no person passed in or out of the gate; all the occupants of the house appeared to have retired to rest.

“At the usual hour yesterday morning the janitor knocked at Mr. Featherstone's door, and continued to knock for several minutes without receiving an answer. He observed that the key of the bedroom was in the lock, a customary sign that Mr. Featherstone was sleeping on the premises. Abutting on the passage is also the door of the sitting-room; there was no key in the lock of this door.

“Upon inquiry, the janitor learnt that Mr. Featherstone entered the house at ten o'clock on the previous night, and was not seen afterwards to leave it. One of the widows who live on the second-floor of No. 21 informed him that Mr. Featherstone, after he entered his apartments, received two visitors; the first

a man who passed her door without her seeing him, the second a man who passed her on the stairs while she was carrying a light. This man, who appeared to be about thirty years of age, she would be able to recognise again; she did not see the features of the other man. The singularity of these visits lies in the fact that they were paid at intervals of fully half an hour, and that both the men left the house together. As they passed the widow's room she opened her door, and looked down the stairs at them. They were arm-in-arm, and it is a fair inference that they were acquainted with each other. The man whose features she did not see walked with tottering steps, and seemed to be much older than his companion.

"At eight o'clock the janitor went again to Mr. Featherstone's room and knocked and called, and again at half-past eight and nine o'clock, without eliciting a response. Acting upon the advice of the neighbours, he summoned a policeman, who accompanied him to Mr. Featherstone's apartments and took upon himself the responsibility of forcing the door of the sitting-room. The first thing they saw was the key of this room lying on the floor, as though it had dropped from the lock, but the constable pointed out that the door might have been locked from the outside, and the key pushed through an open space between the flooring and the bottom of the door. Opening the communicating door of the bedroom and sitting-room, they saw the inanimate form of a man lying, dressed, upon the bed. It proved to be Mr. Featherstone, and he was quite dead.

"The doctor who was called in said that the deceased had been dead for six or seven hours, and perhaps for a longer time. There were marks about the neck of the dead man which convey a suspicion of foul play--of death by strangulation.

"Pregnant features in this mysterious affair are, that Mr. Featherstone was known to have had a considerable sum of money in his possession, and that only four shillings in silver and a few coppers were found in his pockets; nor has any other money been discovered in the apartments. The exact amount he had about him will probably never be known, for Mr. Featherstone was secretive in these matters, and, it is said, confided in no person.

"As may be supposed, the incident has created immense excitement in the neighbourhood, and great numbers of people visited Featherstone Buildings yesterday morning, many re-

maining in the immediate vicinity till late last night. No persons, however, with the exception of those who reside there, or who came upon business, were admitted inside the gates.

"The case is in the hands of the police, who are making strenuous efforts to discover the two men who visited Mr. Featherstone on the night of his death. The inquest will be held to-day."

* * * * *

On the morning of the day that the accounts of the death of Michael Featherstone appeared in the newspapers—the unanimous opinion of the journals being that a deliberate murder had been committed—Warren left the house, with the intention, as Mary understood, of remaining out for several hours in his heart-breaking quest of a situation. He had not been absent an hour before he unexpectedly returned, with a death-like pallor on his face.

"You are ill, Warren!" cried Mary, taking his hand.

It was as cold as ice.

"A strange faintness came over me in the streets," he said, "and I was compelled to return. I do not feel strong enough to go out again."

It needed no persuasion on Mary's part to induce him to keep indoors. He would not allow her to go for a doctor, but sat the whole of the day by the side of his father, in deep and troubled thought. A dozen times he started up at the sound of a foot-step on the stairs, and standing irresolutely by the door, seemed to wait for some impending blow. To all Mary's anxious enquiries his only reply was that his nerves were shaken. He passed a restless and sleepless night, and early the next morning, while his father was asleep, he went out for a few minutes, making Mary promise that his father should be kept at home until he returned. They were so poor that they could not afford to take in a newspaper, and they led a life so secluded that Mary knew and heard nothing of the thousand-and-one stirring events with which the columns of the public journals were daily filled. In the afternoon Warren went out again, saying he might be absent for an hour or two, and making Mary repeat her promise that she would keep his father in the house. During his absence, a knock came at the door, and Mary answered it. A man stood in the passage, a stranger to her, who asked if Mr. Earnshaw was in, and without waiting

for an answer pushed by her into the room. The old man was there, with the children on his lap. He looked up vacantly into the face of the stranger; there were occasions when his mind was a blank, and when he had no understanding of remarks or questions addressed to him by strangers. This was such an occasion, and when the man asked him abruptly if he was Mr. Earnshaw, he passed his hand across his forehead, and turned away without replying, and played with the children he was nursing.

"He is not quite right in his mind," whispered Mary to the man, whose abrupt manner filled her with a vague alarm; "he does not understand what you say."

"Where is your husband?" asked the man.

His voice conveyed a menace, and Mary replied faintly that Warren was not at home. The man gazed at her suspiciously, and without asking leave, opened the door of her sleeping apartment and entered the room, with the evident design of assuring himself that Warren was not hiding there.

"You expect him home some time to-day?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly he will come home to-day."

"Does he ever sleep out?"

"Never," said Mary, who was by this time convinced that her strange visitor was animated by a spirit of enmity towards her husband.

The man asked no further questions, and left as abruptly as he had entered. Mary, looking through the window which faced the street, saw him speak to a woman who was standing on the opposite side of the road, looking up at the house. They lingered for a few minutes, conversing, and then they walked slowly away in company.

* * * * *

Newspaper Extract, November 25th, 1868.

"In another part of our columns will be found the full report of the inquest held on the body of Michael Featherstone, who was found dead in his rooms on the morning of the 23rd inst., under circumstances which indicated that a crime had been committed. The verdict of the jury that the deceased met his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown appears warranted by the evidence, and we trust that the

efforts of the police in tracking the murderer or murderers will be successful. In the brief consideration we propose to give to the case, a recapitulation of the bare facts, which we may assume have been established by the evidence presented at the inquest, will not be out of place.

"At ten o'clock on the night of the 22nd inst., Michael Featherstone entered his apartments with a large sum of money in his possession, and did not again leave them.

"At a quarter-past ten o'clock a man who cannot be identified ascended the stairs of the house in which the deceased resided, and was admitted into his rooms.

"At a quarter to eleven o'clock another man, younger than the first, and whose features were visible to a woman, who is positive she can identify them, was also admitted into Michael Featherstone's apartments.

"At eleven o'clock these two men were seen to descend the stairs leading from Michael Featherstone's rooms, and have not been seen since. Their attitude towards each other was a convincing proof that they were friends.

"At five minutes past eleven o'clock the custodian of the gates through which it was necessary to pass in order to reach Michael Featherstone's house returned to his duties.

"From five minutes past eleven o'clock till midnight the gates were not opened to any person for ingress or egress.

"At midnight the gates were locked by the janitor.

"At half-past nine o'clock on the morning of the 23rd inst., Michael Featherstone was found lying dead on his bed. The evidence of the doctor who was called in immediately the discovery was made fairly establishes the presumption that the deceased did not come to his death by natural means.

"The money which the murdered man had in his possession has disappeared.

"From this simple recital but one conclusion can be arrived at—that the unfortunate man was murdered by the two men who visited him between a quarter-past ten and eleven o'clock on the night of the 22nd inst. At the period of his death the deceased had three clerks in his employment—James White-lock, a man partially paralysed, and two younger men, Thomas Mayple and Thrifty Miller. These three clerks were examined at the inquest. Thomas Mayple and Thrifty Miller have satisfactorily accounted for their time on the night of the murder,

and no possible suspicion can be attached to them ; James Whitelock, unfortunately a man of intemperate habits, was not so successful ; but the woman who saw the two men who visited the deceased is positive that he was not one of them. His physical infirmities arising from his paralytic affliction are so marked that it is scarcely possible she can be mistaken. The responsibility, therefore, rests with the two persons who paid the mysterious visits to the murdered man.

“ We have, up to this point, purposely made but casual reference to the robbery, partly for the reason that, although there is strong presumptive evidence that this crime, as well as the murder, was premeditated, the direct proof has yet to be supplied. Other circumstances in relation with the murder must be borne in mind, in order that no chance may be lost in the vindication of outraged justice. Michael Featherstone was not a popular landlord, and one of his clerks, James Whitelock, is said to have been very severe in the collections of rents from poor tenants. We know what severity of this kind means ; it means eviction, which, on its face, frequently bears the stamp of cruelty. It is certain that much suffering, merited or unmerited, is caused by the adherence of landlords’ agents to hard and fast rules. We are not arguing the justice or injustice of certain issues as they affect landlord and tenant. We speak simply of results, and of the bad blood they are likely to engender, and we direct the attention of those engaged in the investigation of the case to this aspect of it. A motive of revenge for real or imaginary wrongs may almost as likely have led to the murder as the motive of robbery ; the robbery itself may have been an accidental feature in the crime, an after-thought, as it were. This leaves open the entire question of premeditation, although, as we have said, there is strong presumptive evidence that both crimes were premeditated. It is a most suspicious circumstance that Michael Featherstone’s mysterious visitors have not presented themselves for examination, and their silence may almost be accepted as proof of guilt. Had their visits been of a friendly nature, and had they been able to prove that there was no bad blood between them and the deceased, it would have been an easy matter for them to have cleared themselves of the stigma which now rests upon them. All persons who have knowledge of any enmity or ill-feeling entertained towards the deceased by any individual what-

soever should communicate with Scotland Yard. This information, in conjunction with the assistance of the woman who can recognise the features of one of the mysterious visitors, may lead to their discovery ; and should the police succeed in arresting them, their relations with Michael Featherstone must be sifted to their foundation. The elucidation of all the facts relating to their past and present connection will assist the course of justice. We can only express our sincere hope that the tragedy of Featherstone will not be added to the already too numerous undiscovered crimes in the metropolis."

CHAPTER IV.

A VISION OF THE FUTURE.

WHEN Mary was burdened with anxieties which would have deprived most women of strength and hope, she had, as we have already learnt, a twofold solace to uphold her—the solace of work and the solace of prayer. The visit of the stranger had alarmed her, but as the night wore on she really argued herself into the belief that his intentions after all might be friendly, and his visit productive of good. She remembered a man whom she had known in her younger days, whose outward bearing was so uncouth as to cause her to dislike and avoid him, until she heard that in his nature lay a deep well of benevolence, and that the great happiness of his life was drawn from the performance of secret acts of kindness. The nature of her strange visitor might be the same—a heart of goodness in a rough shell. Looking on this bright side made it grow brighter and brighter; she was inexpressibly comforted.

“There will be a change for the better,” she thought, “and my dear husband will be happy and cheerful once more. God is very good to us.”

Long before the clock struck eleven, this comfort had eased her heart. By that time her more pressing household duties were done, and her children and Mr. Earnshaw were peacefully asleep. The old man had not uttered a word during the whole of the day, and his movements were as the movements of a man in a dream; Mary gazed at him as he lay asleep; his face was like the face of a child.

Warren had not come home. Once a fortnight, on this night of the week, he had work to do, the only regular employment he had succeeded in obtaining—books to make up for a small trader, who paid him half-a-crown for six hours’ labour. Despite the smallness of the remuneration and the fact that he could not get home till past midnight, Warren was thankful for the work, and performed it cheerfully. Mary always waited up for him, as she did on this night; but she was more than

usually tired ; she had had a long and busy day, and though she still had mending to do, and made strong efforts to keep awake, she did not succeed ; her hands fell on her lap, and her eyes closed in sleep.

Her hopeful frame of mind influenced her dreams. The clouds that hung over her and her family were dispelled, and bright days were before them. Warren was in an honoured and useful position ; and they were living in a small house in the suburbs, with a pretty garden in front, and a playground in the rear for the children. It is early morning in the summer, and she and Warren are standing by their cottage-door ; he has a few minutes to spare before the departure of the train which takes him every morning to his office in the City. Old Mr. Earnshaw is fastening a vine to the wall, and occasionally turns to her with smiles and gay words. Mary points out to Warren the beauties of the little garden, which she and the old man attend to and take great pride in.

"We shall have the loveliest roses in all England," she says.

She plucks a white bud whose leaves are beginning to unfold, and as she pins it to his coat he stoops and kisses her, and they stand looking into each other's eyes, in which the light of true love is beaming.

"Dear Mary," he says, "I scarcely ever dared to hope that such happiness would be mine."

"I did, Warren," she replies ; "I always knew the time would come ; I never lost heart, I never lost faith. Hide, Warren, hide ! the children are coming down to wish you good morning."

How sweet are their voices, how precious their laughter, as they fling open the door, and call :

"Father, father ! Why, where's father ? There he is, there he is !"

They rush to where he is hiding, behind grandfather's coat-tails, spread out for better concealment, Warren peeping at his children all the while, with eyes full of gladness.

"Good-bye, Philippa—good-bye, Raymond !" he cries, catching them up in his arms and kissing them. How fresh and lovely they are with their fair hair and rosy cheeks ! They, also, pluck flowers for him, and give them to him with tender, merry words.

"You must wear mine just here, father." "And mine just here. Now you do look handsome !"

"What kind of a world would it be, my dear," Warren says to the dreamer, "without children and flowers?"

Then he kisses her, pats the old man caressingly on the shoulder, and walks swiftly away to catch his train. She does not lose sight of him for a moment as he winds his way through the green lanes, and as she gazes after him day melts into night, and he is coming towards her again, his day's work done. With his arm round her waist they stand at the gate of their happy home, talking of their children.

"They are growing, dear," says Warren. "How swiftly the time passes! They will be man and woman before we know where we are."

And wonder on wonders! the sun is shining again, and yonder in the fields their precious ones, now grown to man and woman, are walking side by side.

"I used to pray," says the dreamer, "that you and I might live to see them as they are. Let us follow them and see where they are going."

In silence they follow their children, keeping them ever in sight; and the dreamer's heart throbs with gratitude and delight as she notes the tender care which Raymond takes of his sister.

"Should we be called away," the dreamer says to Warren, "our girl will have a protector."

They walk over mossy paths and through fields of primroses and wood-violets, through lanes of trees in whose branches the birds are building for the coming summer, past rustic cottages whose walls are fragrant with rose and honeysuckle, past fields in which the golden corn is being cut, through solemn woods in which the blood-veined leaves are falling, between white hedges whose bare, sharp twigs are snow-fringed with fantastic fancies.

On and on they walk, with their children before them, until they stop in a churchyard on which the moon is shining. The children linger near a tombstone, and drop some early violets upon the pure white snow which lies lightly on the grave. The dreamer approaches it, holding her husband's hand, and reads the inscription:

"To the Memory of our dear Father."

"I thank God," says Warren, "that his good name was restored to him before he died!"

They tread again in the footsteps of their children, and halt

once more at the door of a ruined cottage, which Philippa and Raymond have entered. Little children are there, in rags, and a wan-faced man, and a sick woman, in direst poverty. And Philippa and Raymond are busy unpacking two baskets of food and clothing, and the sick woman rises on her bed of boards, and a great wonderment flashes into the sunken eyes of the wan-faced man, and the little children clap their hands and spring up to kiss their benefactors.

A sacred joy fills the dreamer's heart, and she enters the cottage with Warren, and clasps her dear ones to her, close, close! And she and they walked home to their nest of love and charity in the light of the winter stars.

* * * * *

She knew not what awoke her from her happy dream, but starting in her chair and opening her eyes, she saw Warren standing by her side.

CHAPTER V.

A SAD PARTING.

"HAVE you been home long, dear?" she asked, rising at once, and busying herself about the room.

"Only a few minutes, Mary," he replied.

"Why did you not wake me?"

"You looked so happy in your sleep that I would not disturb you."

"I was dreaming, Warren."

"A pleasant dream, Mary, or your face would have worn a different expression. It did me good to look at you. Dreams must surely have been given to man to comfort him in his troubles."

"Perhaps. Life contains great sorrows, dear, and great blessings."

"Great sorrows—yes. But great blessings for us, Mary?"

"Can you doubt it, dear? Am I, are our children, a sorrow to you?"

"No, no!" he cried. "I speak sometimes without thinking."

"I know, dear, I know. I was dreaming of you and our little ones, and of our future. So bright, so bright! so peaceful and happy!"

"Dear Mary!"

"How tired you look, Warren! It must be very late."

"It is past one."

"My poor Warren! Working to such an hour for me!"

"There is no merit in it, Mary."

"But there is," she said, kissing him. "Never mind—my dream will come true one day. Sit down and have your supper, dear."

"I have had something to eat; I am not hungry," he said, with a strange hesitation. "Has anything happened while I have been away?"

For a moment the stranger's visit escaped her.

"No, dear," she replied.

"I thought some one might have called."

Then she remembered.

"Oh, yes, some one did call. A man, who asked questions about you."

"What man? What questions?"

She told him all, and he did not interrupt her. His mind was busy on a line of action.

"He was a perfect stranger to you, Mary?"

"Yes, dear."

"Did father answer him when he asked questions?"

"No; father did not understand what was said. I have noticed all yesterday and to-day that his mind is in a perfectly apathetic state; he seems to be oblivious of everything that is passing around him. I doubt whether he even knows what I say when I speak to him; it is one of his worst attacks."

"I pray," said Warren, earnestly, "that it will remain on him for some time. You are surprised, Mary. It seems a strange wish, I know; but father is never so happy as when he is in a condition to forget the past." Warren paused, and went to the window; drawing aside the blind, he looked out into the street. "Is it my fancy, Mary, or is there a man on the opposite side, looking up at the house?"

"It is not a man, dear," said Mary, looking out. "It is a woman, stooping to tie her bootlace, I think. See, she is moving away."

"Yes, I was mistaken."

He stood at the window for two or three minutes, looking anxiously into the street, and Mary, divining that something was weighing on his mind, waited patiently for him to speak. He dropped the blind, and moved into the room and took her hand.

"You were dreaming of a peaceful and happy future, Mary."

"Yes, dear."

"I pray that it may be so, darling."

"It will be so, Warren."

"If faith and sweet courage can compass it, your dream may come true; but the world's hard circumstance is against us. Mary, I see before me a sacred duty."

"Is it in your power to perform it, Warren?"

"It is. It rests solely and entirely upon me."

"Then, dear, you must perform it."

"Dear woman! Brave heart! Attend to me, dear. With respect to this duty there is that in my mind which it is impossible for me to explain. However wild and inexplicable my words and actions may seem, I think I may trust you to believe that everything I do will be done for the best."

"That is certain, dear," said Mary; "the heavier weight of our troubles is upon you. How willingly would I take it all upon my shoulders if it were in my power!"

"How willingly," said Warren, gazing lovingly upon her, "would you take upon yourself all our suffering and misery, and leave us free to enjoy! What sacrifice would be too hard for you to make in the service of those you love? Have I not had proof? And shall I shrink from my duty?—shall I grow faint-hearted with such an example before me? Mary, great as have been our troubles, there may be a trial in store for you to pass unscathed through which will need something more than a woman's faith and love. Perfect as these exist in the woman of my heart, they have human limits."

He spoke calmly and solemnly, and she saw that there was a meaning in his words which had yet to be revealed to her.

"My faith and love can never be shaken, Warren," she said.

"Never, Mary? Despite all evil circumstances, despite what men may whisper, despite dark threats and accusations—would your faith and love survive these shocks?"

"Are these things likely to occur to you, Warren?"

"It is not impossible."

"My faith and love would survive them all, would shine above them all." (Ah, where was now the hope contained in her dream; where the beautiful pictures of the home of love, with its vine-covered walls and its garden of roses; where the roads of tenderness and charity her children had traversed?) "Believe me, husband!" she said entreatingly.

"I do, dear wife." They gazed at each other solemnly and tenderly. "It may be for the last time," thought Warren, "that I shall meet the light of those dear eyes. Heaven give me strength!" Then he said aloud:

"You must promise, Mary, not to question me, and to follow out my instructions implicitly, without seeking to discover my motives."

"I promise, Warren."

"How much money have you?"

She showed him her purse, which contained six shillings and a few coppers, and told him there was something owing to her for work she had delivered.

"There are still a few trifles left, Mary, upon which you can raise a little money."

"Yes, dear; and you must not forget that I can sell as much lace-work as I can do, and that it is being discovered that I am wonderfully clever at the best kinds. I shall soon be better paid for it; and if I have to work an hour or two more a day, what does that matter? I am strong and well, thank God!"

"Dear woman! You see, Mary, I shall be no more expense to you in the future."

"Warren!"

"Remember, dear, remember. It is for this trial I am preparing you. Dear wife, we must part!"

"Part!" she echoed; she could scarcely repress a cry of anguish, so unexpected and so bitter was the news. "When?"

"This very night!"

"Oh, Warren! is it absolutely necessary that you should go to-night?"

"It is imperative."

She summoned all her fortitude.

"Shall we be parted long, Warren?"

"I do not know; but it is certain that I shall be away for some time. I am going to seek work elsewhere; all my efforts here are unavailing, and I must contrive to give bad fortune the slip. Now, Mary, about our father. For a few weeks, at least, he must not be allowed to wander out alone; his condition is too critical. Endeavour to keep him indoors, and if he insists upon leaving the house you must accompany him."

"I can manage it, Warren. There is a young girl, the daughter of a new lodger, who is fond of the children, and who will look after them while I am away."

"Even then, Mary, you must use your best efforts to prevent him from wandering farther than this street. You have such a great influence over him that I do not despair of your being able to guide him. Again, Mary—on no account must he be allowed to read a newspaper."

"He never does, Warren. If he can get a book with pictures in it he is satisfied."

"But the desire may come upon him. Divert his mind from it ; he is easily led."

"I will do so, dear."

"There still remains something more. If the stranger who visited you to-day comes again and inquires for me, say that I have gone away to seek work ; if he asks you in what direction, say that you are unable to tell him. It will be the truth," Warren added with a faint smile, "for I scarcely know myself. Should father ask for me, say that I have gone into the country hoping to obtain a situation, and that one day I shall return, or shall write to you to come to me."

"All shall be done as you wish, Warren. May I say something ?"

"Yes, dear."

"In the decision you have arrived at, and in the instructions you have given me, which, without understanding, I recognise must be of deep importance, can I not in some way advise you ?"

"No, Mary ; you cannot advise me."

"Is it really necessary that I should remain in ignorance of your motives ? It is not because I have not perfect confidence in you that I ask this ; only that a woman's counsel is sometimes of value, and that I would not have you in your trouble overlook anything which might possibly be of assistance to you."

"Mary," said Warren, "you can only help me by attending to my instructions and carrying them out. I trust the day will come when you will learn all. There *is* something in my mind which for the present must remain hidden from you, but it is for your good and mine that it is hidden, and for the good of our children. I can say nothing more. There is One who sees the secrets of the heart, and from whom nothing can be hidden. In His eyes I shall not stand condemned."

"I am satisfied, dear. You will want some things to take with you ; I will get them ready."

"As little as possible, Mary. I must kiss my children and my father good-bye before I leave."

He went into the inner room and kissed his babes, and whispered as he leant over them, "Not for me, dear ones, to bring shame and dishonour into your lives ! God and your angel mother will protect you !" He lingered by the side of

his sleeping father, and pressed his lips to his forehead, and whispered a farewell. Then he returned to Mary, who had been busy making up a parcel of underclothing and such necessaries as he might require on his journey. She shed no tears as he took her hand in his. They sat in silence for a little while, and presently she sank upon her knees, and he knelt by her side, and prayed with her. Then he rose.

"Good-bye, dear wife."

"Good-bye, dear husband. Trust in God!"

"I do, and will. While I am absent from you, you will be ever in my thoughts. No other woman has ever found place in my heart. I will be faithful to you to the last hour of my life. Tell me, Mary: in looking back to the past can you recall anything I have left undone which might have altered our lives for the better?"

"Indeed, indeed no, my darling! You have done everything for the best; you have nothing to reproach yourself with."

"You comfort me, dear. As in the past, so it shall be in the future. I will carefully consider every step I take, with but one object in view—how I can secure you and your little ones from a greater misfortune than any that has yet fallen upon us. Ah! my dearest, this is a hard parting for both of us. Farewell, my heart—till a brighter day shall dawn!"

He held her in his arms, and kissed her face, her lips, her eyes; then suddenly released her, and was gone.

When he was outside the house he looked cautiously about him, and breathed a sigh of relief upon finding that no person was near to observe his departure. Mary listened to his footsteps on the stairs, and heard the opening and the closing of the street-door. It was as though a door in her heart had opened and closed. The hand of desolation was upon her. Her face grew white as the face of death, her lips trembled, a great blindness fell upon her soul. Surely at that supreme moment an angel must have touched her lips with pitying hand, that there should have dropped from them in a whisper the holy words, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy will be done!" Peace fell upon her and encompassed her with its compassionate wings. With the tears streaming down her face, she raised her arms and sobbed audibly, "Thy will be done—Thy will be done!"

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER VISIT FROM THE DETECTIVE.

AT ten o'clock on the following morning, the man who had visited her on the previous day again made his appearance, and asked for her husband. She gave him the message Warren had left.

"Gone away!" he exclaimed with an angry flush on his face; "and you don't know where! Did he come home last night?"

"Yes," Mary replied.

"Just like my luck," grumbled the man; "when I think I have a real good thing in hand, it slips from me. Here—come in, you!"

The last words were addressed to a woman standing in the passage, and who, in obedience to the order, now entered the room.

Mary found the courage to ask, "By what right do you intrude yourself and your companion upon me?"

"By right of law," said the man. "Perhaps you never heard the name of Featherstone."

"Oh yes," said Mary, trembling at mention of the name; "we have sad reason to remember it."

"No doubt," said the man, staring hard at her; "then you know well enough what brings me here. Bear in mind one thing about me, and keep a civil tongue in your head. The law is on my side, and I have authority for what I do."

Mary had not heard or read of the murder. So absorbing was the struggle for existence in which she was engaged, that she took no interest in the newspapers, and never looked at one unless Warren brought it home. It was the same with the majority of the people in the neighbourhood. Their own troubles were enough for them; the rise of a half-penny on the four-pound loaf was of greater importance to them than all the national and social upheavings of the day. The mightiest potentate in the world is King Stomach; every other monarch is a pigmy in comparison.

The street in which Mary lived was so poor that newsboys never invaded it, nor tempted its residents with the hot spices which keep newspaper columns at fever-heat. But without further enlightenment the name of Featherstone was a sufficient terror to the wife of Warren Earnshaw. It possessed, for her and hers, the deadly qualities of the upas-tree, poisoning the very air they breathed. What had her husband frequently said?—that this enemy would never rest till he had hunted Warren into his grave. For Warren's sake, therefore, she held her tongue, and allowed her visitor to carry out his intentions; and she mentally resolved to give him as little information as possible of Warren's movements.

"Has the old man I saw here yesterday afternoon," asked the man, "disappeared as well as your husband?"

"No," said Mary; "he is at home."

"I must see him."

She pushed open the door of the inner room in which Mr. Earnshaw was sitting. The detective—for such he was—directed the woman's attention to him.

"Is that one of the men," he asked, "you saw going upstairs?"

The woman looked long and earnestly at Mr. Earnshaw, then shook her head and answered:

"I can't say that I've ever seen him before."

The detective made an impatient movement.

"It is as I suspected. The younger of the two is the man you saw."

"It must be so," said the woman.

"You are, of course, prepared to deny," said the detective to Mary, "that you have a portrait of your husband in the place." His sharp eyes had discovered an album, and it was now in his hands. "Is his likeness in this book?"

"Yes," replied Mary.

The detective handed the book to the woman, with the words:

"Look through it, and show me the man."

The woman turned over the pages very slowly, and examined the portraits with great care, shaking her head from time to time.

"No," she said, when she came to the last; "the face of the man I saw on the stairs is not here."

A sigh of relief escaped Mary's breast. Completely in the dark as she was to the meaning of these proceedings, it seemed as if a great mysterious danger had been averted by the woman's inability to recognise her husband's face.

"Are you sure?" cried the detective angrily. "Look again." The woman looked again, and turned over every page.

"I could not swear," she said, "to any of the likenesses in the book."

"Is there no one resembling him?"

"No one."

The detective snatched the album from her, and handed it to Mary.

"Show me," he said, "your husband's portrait."

Mary hesitated for a moment, and the detective observed her hesitation.

"Are you afraid?" he demanded.

"No," said Mary, "I am not afraid. I will show you my husband's picture."

But to her great surprise and bewilderment, when she turned to the familiar page in which the photograph of her husband should have appeared, the page was blank. The portrait had been removed.

"It is gone!" she said.

"Gone," echoed the detective. "Of course it is gone. I might have known as much."

His voice expressed both triumph and disappointment.

"I cannot understand it," said Mary.

"Of course you can't," said the detective, biting his finger. "You didn't take it out—not a bit of it!"

"No," said Mary, scarcely knowing whether to attach any importance to the mysterious disappearance of the portrait, "indeed I did not."

"Just what I say," said the detective, his eyes wandering round the walls; "you didn't take it out, of course. It walked out, having legs. It's a black sign, ma'am, let me tell you that, and a direct sign. Clear evidence, I call it; and as sure as we're standing here talking of it, it will go against you. Perhaps you'll object to tell me at what hour your husband left the house, and what direction he took."

"Yes," said Mary, roused to courage by the man's inimical and insulting manner; "I shall tell you nothing more. You come here for an evil purpose."

"I can't exactly blame you," said the detective; "it isn't to be supposed that a wife will go against her husband. No, I don't blame you for it—nature's nature; but I've got my duty to do, and I'm going to do it. You'll find out when you're dealing with me that you're not dealing with a fool. It's my opinion your husband's not far off, and I mean to set a watch on this house."

He was as good as his word. He, or one of the comrades, with whom Mary frequently saw him conversing, kept watch in the street for two or three weeks; the woman who had accompanied him was also often there, walking up and down in an apparently listless fashion, but really with all her wits about her. During this time Mary went out as little as possible, and old Mr. Earnshaw never once left the house. This secret watch upon her movements was a great torture to her; she knew that she was followed wherever she went; no one spoke to her or molested her, but she felt as if enemies encompassed her. It happened sometimes, when she came home from marketing or from delivering her work to the firm by which she was employed, that she saw the detective on the stairs. On those occasions only did he address her.

"No news of your husband?" he would ask.

"No," she would reply.

"You have not heard from him?"

"No."

It was true enough; not a line had she received from Warren, and under the circumstances of this mysterious and tormenting watch she was not sure whether she ought not to be grateful that he did not write to her.

During those days her state was very sad and distressing. At length this espionage came to an end. The detective presented himself and said:

"You have put us off the scent; you are a very clever woman."

This praise was a fresh torture to her, and she simply said:

"I have told you the truth from first to last."

"I suppose that's it, and that's where you've beaten me. We're not accustomed to the truth. We shall look elsewhere now."

"What has my husband done," asked Mary faintly, "that you should persecute and hunt him down, as you are doing?"

“What has he done?” repeated the detective; he was heard to say in after-times, when speaking of the case, that he had never been able to make up his mind whether Mary was acting or not in her interviews with him. “Well, that has to be found out. Just now, the least said the soonest mended.”

With that, he left her. Those were dark days indeed for Mary; she had not a human friend to give her a kindly word of sympathy. The burden of silence lay heavily upon her. No letter came from Warren; her heart beat with passionate emotion at every postman’s knock; in hope and fear she watched and waited for those prosaic messengers of despair and joy—and still no letter! But she continued to work bravely on until for the last time the detective visited her, and imparted to her the fatal news of her husband’s death.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY'S DESPAIR.

It was night, and Mary's children were asleep; she and her father sat together in silence. The officer of the law entered the room with but little ceremony, and abruptly said:

"I have often asked you where your husband was, and you have refused to tell me."

"I do not know," she replied stonily. She saw in her visitor one who had bitterly persecuted her in the performance of his secret duty, and who had thrown out mysterious accusations against her husband, which had filled her with indignant horror. "I did not know, or I would have informed you."

"Of course you would," he said, in a tone so contemptuous that she dug her nails into the palms of her hands to restrain her just passion. "It is the way of such as you when we are hunting a criminal."

"Stop!" she cried. "If you have a man's heart in your breast, say nothing more for a while. Father, would you mind going into the other room, and sitting by the children? I am afraid they will wake, and I want to speak in private to this gentleman."

She led him unresistingly to the inner room, in which she and her children slept.

"Now!" she said when she returned.

"As you would not give me news of your husband," said the man, "I have come to give you news of him."

Dimly she divined that it was bad news, and her heart was faint within her.

"Tell me," she said.

There was no light in the room. Let us charitably hope it was because the man could not witness the exquisite anguish which was bearing her down that he was callous to it.

"Your husband is found."

"Found!" she echoed.

She would have flown to the door to see him, had it not been

that the tone in which the word was uttered by her visitor conveyed terror to her soul.

"Found," he repeated. "Have you got a candle?"

She brought forward one, and he lighted it. Then she saw that he held in his hand a newspaper and a bundle.

"He was found in the river Dee. Here are his clothes, which we shall retain."

Her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth; she strove to speak, but could utter no sound.

"Whether it was suicide or not," continued her visitor, "will never be rightly known. An open verdict was returned at the inquest. We have had his clothes in our possession for ten days; they were lying on the river's bank, and his name was on an envelope in one of the pockets. We suspected he was in the river, and dragged for him. When we found him he was hardly recognisable—not at all recognisable, I should rather say—from his being so long in the water. Here is the report of the inquest; I will leave the paper with you if you like. After all, perhaps it was the best thing that could happen to him, for had he been found alive instead of dead he would have been arrested for murder!"

She could scarcely follow his words. She took the paper mechanically, and thrust it into her pocket. What was this blow that had so horribly fallen upon her? Had the world suddenly come to an end? Dead! Her husband, her beloved one, who had toiled and suffered, and been hunted to his doom! And that his name should be associated with the crime of murder! She heard nothing more; she did not see the man leave the room. But, presently, looking round in fear, she saw that she was alone. In an agony of despair she blew out the light. There might be safety in darkness.

Shut out, shut out for ever, seemed all earthly and spiritual light. How long she sat in darkness she never knew. But suddenly she started up. Her children! They were sleeping near her. Her father—Warren's father—was in the room with them. They still remained with her, and depended upon her. So strong was her sense of duty that she rose to her feet, like a woman in a dream. Staggering into the bedroom, she gathered her babes to her breast, and taking the old man's hand, cried, in a hoarse whisper:

"Come! For heaven's sake, come, and let us leave this spot, never, never to look upon it again!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE VISION IN THE NIGHT.

HE allowed her to lead him from the house, but his eyes wore a troubled look ; there was a doubt in his mind, which the suddenness of Mary's movements prevented from assuming definite form. It was a bitterly cold night ; snow was falling heavily. The keen wind would have pierced her marrow had she been susceptible to outward influences ; but a fire was burning within her which rendered her insensible to aught but her own overwhelming grief. The snow soaked through her boots ; she heeded it not, but plodded doggedly onwards. It was as though her body, which was mechanically performing a task far beyond her natural strength, was void of any touch of spiritual life. Her soul was struggling among the breakers. What was it her cruel visitor had said ? That her dear husband was dead, and was put away from her and her children ? But that was to be borne ; there was a hereafter, and her faith was infinite. No, it was not that which lacerated her moral being. It was that upon his memory lay a stigma as false as it was foul, and that she was powerless to remove it.

Words he had spoken to her but a few months since, when he lay upon a sick-bed, seemed to cut themselves in the air as she thought of them :

"Mary, I would have you bear in mind what I now say. Whatever occurs, never believe that I have been tempted into wrong-doing. No conscious sin lies, nor shall ever lie, at my door. Rather than that, I should pray for death to overtake me !"

Well, death *had* overtaken him, and he lay in a dishonoured grave. What mattered even that ? It was man's judgment, and it did not disturb her love for the dead. On the contrary, the love she had for him was now embalmed in heavenly faith. Pure and sinless he reigned in her soul ; but the shadow which hung over his grave, though it was dug a hundred miles away, rested also upon the lives of her children. There lay the sting.

That for these innocent ones the pages of the future should be so blackened almost before they had begun to live! She pressed her babes convulsively to her bosom, and, with the old man by her side, walked through the white streets, while the pitiless storm raged around her. She knew not the direction she was taking; it did not trouble her; she would leave far behind her the neighbourhood in which all her hopes had been so cruelly, so mercilessly wrecked. She was poor—very, very poor; her purse contained barely twenty shillings, and she was wandering forth into the world, content so that she could reach a spot where people, houses, and streets, all were strange to her. No word was uttered by the old man, but now and then he stopped with uncertain, distressful looks. She would not allow him to linger.

“Come, come!” she whispered hoarsely to him; “we must get the children to bed.”

He was accustomed to obey her. She had been the guiding spirit of their humble home, the comforter, the strengthener, upon whom they had leant in perfect trust and confidence. He obeyed her now, and held her by the arm awhile, to relinquish his hold presently and gaze in doubt about him. But still she urged him on, and still he obeyed her. When she spoke it was in whispers; she was afraid of the sound of her voice, and fearful lest people should recognise it, and strive to bar her progress. At length, at ten o'clock on that never-to-be-forgotten night, she halted in a narrow street; she was ignorant of its name and locality, but she saw in some of the parlour windows the announcement of rooms to let. In one of the poor dwellings she obtained lodgings, and buying a piece of candle from the landlady, she lit it and went to the top of the house, accompanied by the old man. There was a small bedroom for herself and babes, and a smaller closet adjoining, in which the old man was to sleep. Putting the candle on the table, she addressed him, and he spoke for the first time.

“Are you tired, father?”

“Tired?” he echoed. “No, no, I am not tired.”

“You must be hungry, dear.”

“I cannot eat,” he muttered.

“Will you stay here with the children while I go out and get some milk?” She recalled his wandering attention by adding, “Warren’s children, father.”

"Yes, yes," he muttered. "Warren's children! My boy—my dear, dear son! Where is he? Where is my boy?"

She shuddered. All her strength was required to prevent a passionate flood of tears. Already she had resolved to keep from him the news of the death and the accusation.

"Are you listening to me, father?"

"Yes."

"You do not forget—"

He interrupted her vacantly.

"Forget? I can never forget!"

"I did not mean that," she said, pressing her hands tight on her bosom. She had laid the sleeping children on the bed, and had covered them up. "I mean that the children must have some milk, and I must buy it at once, or all the shops will be shut. I can trust you to remain here with them while I go out and fetch it. For my sake, father!"

She kissed him, and the doubt in his face vanished; he smiled tenderly upon her, and took his place by the side of the children. Knowing that she could trust him then, she hurried out, and soon returned with a tin of preserved milk, and bread, and wood to light a fire. Leaving these in the room, she ran downstairs again and brought up a scuttleful of coals and a cup and saucepan. The fire was quickly lighted and the food prepared for the children, who were now awake and fretting for it. She fed them, and nature's cravings being satisfied, they fell asleep. That duty performed, she made the old man sit by the fireside, and took off his shoes and stockings and bathed his feet. He allowed her to busy herself about him, attending to his comfort, in the self-sacrificing spirit which impelled her ever to administer to the wants of others and to neglect her own. She made some bread and milk, and endeavoured to induce him to eat it, but he would not touch it.

"You will sleep here to-night, father," she said, pointing to the closet in which his bed was made; "it is very comfortable, and I will keep the children quiet. Sleep well, dear, for to-morrow we must commence our new life."

He echoed her last words.

"Our new life! Warren will share it with us, Mary. To-morrow, yes, to-morrow he will come to us. Be sure of that, my dear—be sure of that!"

She took his hand and said solemnly :

“Father, we must not forget that Warren has been absent from us for a long while. He is, as we all are, in God’s hands. It may be that he will never join us here.”

He made no further remark, but appeared to be pondering over what she had said, and shortly afterwards she led him to his bed, and kissing him, bade him good-night and left him.

She returned to the fireside and sat there for an hour, and would have sat longer had she not been fearful of wasting the coals. Every penny was precious to her, more precious than it had ever been. It devolved upon her to provide the daily bread for her children and Warren’s father. She had but little fear of being able to do so, for she was a skilful lace-worker ; but to this end she must preserve her strength ; she must not break down.

She had in her pocket the newspaper the detective had left with her. How her hands trembled as she took it out ! The words swam before her eyes, and it was long before she could read the report of the inquest. Yes, it was true, fatally true. Her husband was dead ; his sufferings were over, and she and her children were left to fight the grim battle alone. She debated within herself whether she would keep the paper. The name of her husband was there, and associated with it some vague suspicion of a crime. It would be dangerous to keep it. Although the old man never looked at a newspaper, this, by some chance, might fall into his hands. The name of Earnshaw would surely attract him, and what he read might kill him. She resolved to burn the newspaper, and tearing it into small pieces, she put it into the fire, and watched the flames consume the dread memorial.

Then she knelt by her bed and prayed. The night advanced, the fire died slowly out, the white snow fell in the quiet streets, and still she knelt and prayed.

“Assist me to be strong, dear Lord, for the sake of those who have no other earthly help ! Give me strength to bear and keep from the knowledge of my dear children the dread story of which only Thou knowest the truth ; and if it is Thy will that the truth shall never be proclaimed on earth, endow me with humbleness and patience to submit ! Look down upon my babes, O merciful God, and make me strong to work and to bear the trials through which I am passing ! Sustain me,

O Lord, and lay Thy protecting hand upon me and my children and my dear husband's father ! ”

This was the theme of her prayers, and but for the comfort they brought her she would have been driven mad by the horror which encompassed her.

Kneeling, she fell asleep, and dreamt of Warren, and of some happy days that shone out in the troublous past. The crying of her babes awoke her, and she crept into bed and hushed them to sleep.

At seven o'clock in the morning, while it was still dark, she was up and about, tidying the room, lighting the fire, and borrowing from the landlady of the house such domestic articles as she could spare. She trod very softly, so that she should not awake the sleepers. She had mentally arranged the order of her life ; she would commence work that very evening. In the old lodgings from which she had flown, there were a few trifles belonging to her which she would bring away in the course of the day. Part of these she would turn into money with which to purchase domestic necessities ; the rest she hoped to be able to keep. They consisted chiefly of relics of her younger days, among them articles of dress, many of which had belonged to her mother, of which she had taken the greatest care. She would have no need to purchase clothes for years, and she was already mentally devising alterations to make them of use for her children.

This woman, upon whom had fallen an affliction so deep that the suffering it carried with it could scarcely be excelled, was not entirely unhappy. Faith and prayer supported her, and she recognised the direct religion which lies in the performance of earthly duties.

She went to the door of the room in which the old man had retired to rest, and softly called him :

“ Father ! ”

There was no reply ; she called him three or four times, and silence was the only answer she received. She pushed open the door, and entered the room. It was empty.

The bed bore the impress of a human form, but the sheets had not been turned down. He had evidently lain down in his clothes, and, waiting till she was asleep, had secretly left the house.

Mary ran to the landlady, and asked if she had seen anything of him.

"No," the woman replied, but she fancied she had heard a sound at about four o'clock in the morning, as of some one entering or leaving the house. "That's not strange," said the woman, "because I have two other lodgers, and one of them is a compositor on a morning paper, and has a latchkey."

It had continued snowing all night, and the snow now lay an inch thick on the roads and pavements. In great trouble and perplexity Mary washed and dressed her babes, and prepared the breakfast, in the dim hope that the absent one would return. But nine o'clock, ten o'clock, twelve o'clock struck, and there were no signs of him. As the afternoon waned, a terrible fear, which she had striven hard to banish, took complete possession of her. Had doubt as to the fate of his son driven the old man to dispose of his life as if it belonged to him and not to God?

"No, no!" she cried, in the agony of her soul, "he has gone away because he would not be a burden upon me. He knows how poor we are, and he would sacrifice himself for us. I must find him—I must find him; but where to look—where?"

Ah, where? Amidst the labyrinth of white streets, which way should she turn to seek the lost one? She could think on but one place, her old lodgings, the rent of which was paid to the end of the week. She had placed the key of the rooms on the mantel-shelf the previous night. She searched for it in vain; there was no doubt the old man had taken it. The grateful tears ran down her face as she murmured, "How wicked of me to suppose he could commit an act so sinful!"

She would not leave her children behind; she wrapped them up warm, and giving a message to the landlady, in case the old man should return in her absence, she hurried into the streets. She was compelled now to inquire her way, and it seemed an age before she reached the house in which she had lived with her husband. In feverish haste she ascended the stairs, and, her heart beating violently, tried the handle of the door. It turned in her hand, and entering the room, she saw the old man standing in a listening attitude. He exhibited no surprise at beholding her.

"I had a fancy," he said, in a weak voice, "that it was Warren's footstep on the stairs."

He was very faint; for four-and-twenty hours he had not tasted food.

Mary had come prepared; she had stopped on the road to purchase half-a-quartern loaf and two ounces of butter. He thankfully ate what she gave him, and then took the children from her, and sat with them on his lap.

"Mary," he asked, "was it a dream I had last night?"

"Tell me, father," she replied.

"It isn't easy," he said, "my thoughts wander so. Do *you* see figures that fade as you approach them? Do *you* hear voices when no one is near you?"

Knowing what would best tend to soothe him, she said in a cheerful tone that she often had such fancies.

"Why, then," he said, smiling at her, "I suppose everybody has; men and women—and children too, perhaps."

"What was your dream, dear?"

"Of white snow falling, falling, falling, and a long, long walk through melancholy streets."

"It was snowing all night, father."

"Was it? Then my dream was a truthful one, and must be followed out, if we are to remain faithful to Warren. We *shall* be faithful to him, Mary, whatever happens."

"Yes, father."

"There were voices in the snow. 'Turn back,' they said, 'turn back. You are deserting your boy; you are leaving Warren behind you. Are you angry with him, are you ashamed of him, that you fly from him?' I stopped and strove to retrace my steps, but some strange power impelled me onwards, farther and farther away. White figures stood before me, and implored me not to proceed, but I passed through them, having no power to obey. I must have walked many miles, and Mary, you were with me, and our little ones here; you were carrying them in your arms in the midst of the blinding snow. We entered a strange house, and I threw myself on a bed, without undressing, and in the night Warren came to me. 'Father,' he said, 'why do you forsake me? There are no memories of happier days in this strange place. Where you go Mary will go, and I shall be alone—deserted by all I love. I stood by you when ruin overtook you; I defended you when you were falsely accused. I have committed no sin, that you should be ashamed of the very walls which sheltered me. Do you love me no longer, that you fly from the house in which we held together, with Mary to cheer and guide us—from the house in which our children were born?'

I stretched forth my arms, and cried, 'Forgive me, Warren, forgive me!' Then I heard his voice in the distance, calling me to come. I rose and stole out of the strange house. Angels must have led me through the dark streets, for I knew not where I was; and the moment I entered this room peace entered my heart. It is our home hallowed by tender memories. Warren sat in that chair night after night, and talked to us and read to us. Though he is absent now, his spirit remains. We must never, never leave this place again. It would be as though we cast reproach upon him, as though we lacked courage to defend him. To the last hour of my life I shall live here; and you, Mary, you will not seek another home?"

"No, father," said Mary, "I will not leave you."

Thus it happened that they continued to reside in a neighbourhood which was fraught with sweet and sorrowful memories.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAD TOY-SELLER.

AGAIN the curtain falls, and rises now after a lapse of years, during which Mary has toiled on bravely, and watched with pride and love her children, Philippa and Raymond, grow into life's springtime.

Grandfather Earnshaw was still with them : a tall, spare man, of gentlemanly bearing, whose white hair hung to his shoulders, and whose strangely-bright eyes were in the habit of wandering restlessly around, with a listening look in them, as he sat behind a screen at a common deal table, making penny wooden toys, which he sold in the western and northern thoroughfares of the city.

Although the actions of a man harmlessly mad can scarcely be supposed to be controlled by a sentiment of pride or shame it is a fact that old Mr. Earnshaw never disposed of his wares in the locality in which he resided. With a covered basket on his arm he would walk miles before he exposed his toys and offered them for sale.

For years he had been thus engaged, until in certain parts of London he became a familiar figure, and was known as the mad toy-seller. He earnt very little, the balance in his favour at the end of the week seldom exceeding a shilling, often not so much ; but he never grumbled or repined, and if he came home late at night, as he frequently did, with but threepence or fourpence in his possession, and his basket, which he had taken out full, quite empty, he would hand the money to his daughter without a word, and after partaking of the humble meal she had prepared for him, would retire behind the screen and sit down to his work again, and not leave it till it was time to retire to rest.

Sometimes, on rainy days, he would come home soaked to the skin, and, in obedience to Mary's gentle coaxing, would change his clothes before he resumed his work. Old as he was, this man for a number of years had not known an hour's sick-

ness ; for one so aged his health was marvellous. Though he would be on his feet for ten or twelve hours at a time, and though his only meal consisted of a crust of bread and a draught of water from a drinking-fountain, he never complained of weariness.

With an instinctive consciousness that these lengthy wanderings were sadly destructive of shoe-leather, and that Mary could ill afford to keep him in boots, he had learnt to repair them with his own hands, and was indeed quite a skilful amateur cobbler.

Occasionally, Mary, before he went out in the morning, would put into the pocket of his long coat food more tempting than plain bread, but he never failed to discover the kind deception, and would set the better food aside, and help himself to a crust from the scantily-provided cupboard.

"Only for this once, father," she would plead, pressing the bread and meat upon him. "Indeed we can spare it."

"No, no, my love," he would say ; "keep it for the children."

All her persuasion could not induce him to accept it.

On winter nights there was something inexpressibly touching in the figure of this old man bending over his work at the table, lighted by one thin candle ; and but a bare knowledge of his history was required to invest it with pathetic dignity.

He spoke very little, indoors or out ; but his eyes, which were seldom in repose, and a peculiar restless manner which distinguished him when he was in the streets, denoted that there was active, if secret, life stirring within him.

He never solicited custom ; those who chose to buy of him purchased of their own prompting. There were substantial reasons for the smallness of his profits and takings. In the first place, his toys were really worth the money, and frequently cost him as much as he sold them for ; no considerations of political economy tempted him to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market. He had but one price for his merchandise, whether it comprised windmills, money-boxes, birds fluttering on wires, or white baa-lambs with snowy wool and gold bands round their necks—that price was a penny. Then, he would not sell to everybody ; something in the expression of a face which did not please him was sufficient to induce him to decline custom. In the second place, he gave many of his toys away. The recipients of these gifts were invariably children

under ten years of age, whose hair was light brown, as his son's had been at that age, and whose eyes were blue, as his own were, and as Warren's had been.

A certain awkwardness of incident occasionally waited upon these free offerings of his heart, which were born of the tenderest memories of a son lost to him and to those who were entitled to call the lost one husband and father. Sometimes the child who attracted him was well dressed, and was accompanied by father or mother, who could afford to purchase more expensive toys than the simple wares in which he dealt. They would offer to pay for the toys he presented, not infrequently in silver money: but he would push their hands gently aside, and proceed onwards in silence. Then it would happen, with some who insisted on his accepting payment, that finding him obdurate, they offered him back the toys. These also he rejected; and if they still persisted, and thrust his gifts upon him, he would allow them to fall to the ground, where they soon found owners among the ranks of the poor children who jostled their more fortunate brothers and sisters in the fashionable streets. A man who carried on business in this spirit could never hope to prosper, could never even hope to earn sufficient to pay for the humblest necessities of life. This consideration, if it ever found a place in his mind, had no effect upon him. He had but one hope, but one desire. Perhaps it was in anticipation of its realization that he looked about him so restlessly as he walked abroad, and listened at home, with his bright eyes wandering round the room, for a familiar footstep on the stairs which never came. Sometimes when he was in the house his senses beguiled him, and he would step softly to the door, and, opening it, call in a low sweet tone, "Warren, my boy! Warren! Is it you?"

Meeting with no response, he would creep back to his table, and resume his work. Not in hopelessness or despondency; a mysterious spirit upheld and supported him. At these times Mary never questioned him, never spoke to him; but if by chance he met her eye, he would nod, with a tender, vacant smile, and say:

"Patience, Mary, patience. He will come one day."

Yes, one day a miracle would happen, and the witless man of seventy, who was endowed with a physical strength rare in one of his years, waited for it in patience and blind faith.

Utterly devoid of the cunning of worldliness must this man have been, for had he chosen to take advantage of his opportunities he might really have brought home sufficient money to keep in comfort those with whom his fate was linked. He inspired compassion in many kindly breasts, and money was offered to him in the streets. He would gaze mildly on those who desired to assist him, and shaking his head, would pass them silently. A strange experience, indeed, to those whom the eternal pathos of the poor and helpless, ever flowing through the thoroughfares of the giant city, moved to an impulse of charity. They would talk of it afterwards, and speak of his worn garments, of his manifest poverty, of his singular dignity ; but speculate as they might, they never obtained a solution of this pathetic mystery of London life.

His workshop was in a corner of one of the two rooms in which Mary Earnshaw and her children lived. A screen, reaching nearly to the low ceiling, secluded it, and there, in contented isolation, would he sit, and toil, and wait. On a little bracket which Mary had fastened to the wall was screwed a small open box in which she deposited the money he brought home ; and from this scanty store, which never amounted to more than two or three shillings, she would take sufficient to purchase the materials he needed for the manufacture of his wares. She had grown to thoroughly understand his wants, and she would set his table in order during his absence, and arrange thereon the coloured and gold and silver paper, the wire, the shreds of wood, the gum, and paints necessary for his work. It was a labour of love for her to search the cheap wholesale warehouses in and around Houndsditch for new material upon which he could exercise his ingenuity. She knew that it was life to him to keep his mind and hands thus employed ; that without this labour he would languish and probably die ; or, what would have been worse, that his madness, which now was harmless, might take a form which would be dangerous. Then it might be decided by those in authority that, for his safety and hers, he should be taken from her. That risk, at whatever sacrifice and deprivation, must be avoided. He was no trouble to her, sad as were the memories his presence kept alive ; she drew comfort from him. Was he not her dear Warren's father, and had he not endured a martyrdom of suffering ? Gentle and sweet and tender, he lived his days and bore his cross without

a murmur. She had no fear of him for her children ; he himself was harmless as a child.

The most peculiar form of his mental affliction was that his mind was often a blank as to time ; he lost count not only of days, but of weeks and months and seasons. The buds would burst, and he would say, " We are having a long and beautiful spring ; when winter comes I hope it will be a mild one for the sake of the poor." It was the echo of a wish of his prosperous years, which lay so far back in the past, and he spoke of it as if it were yesterday.

In the presence of this old man, whom she loved, and honoured, and pitied with all the strength of her pure and tender soul, she recognised and fulfilled a sacred duty, sacred as that which devolved upon her in the persons of her beloved children. Flower of unselfishness that blossoms in the humblest places, in courts and alleys where sin and squalor dwell, in weak forms and famished breasts, from which wan babes draw scanty nourishment, bright shall your leaves and petals be on that awful Judgment Day, when the archangel's trumpet shall summon rich and poor before the Heavenly Throne !

CHAPTER X.

THE VISIT TO THE DOCTOR.

NOTWITHSTANDING the number of years during which Mary had lived in the neighbourhood, she had not succeeded in gathering round her a circle of friends. True, she had no great wish for friends. All the impulses and desires of her being had but one inspiration and one goal—the happiness of her lost Warren's father and her dear children. Apart from this she had not a human aspiration. To clothe and feed them, to keep them well in health, to shield them, so far as lay in her power, from the storms of life, to take upon herself the entire burden of the daily duties—to these ends she devoted every nerve of her body. She gratefully accepted as her full reward the consciousness that her children were happy—as indeed they might well have been, having no cares, and no knowledge of the tears their mother often shed as she bowed her head over the fine lacework by which she earned their living. Her refined occupation in a neighbourhood which abounded in costermongers, no less than the unusual names of her children, Raymond and Philippa, lifted her above the level of her neighbours, who in many ways resented this superiority. Not that it was in the remotest manner asserted. Perhaps it was because they acknowledged that she was above them, and believed it was for that reason she did not mix with them, that her pale face touched not their hearts; but indeed there may have been a less subtle explanation in the fact that the locality was but too familiar with pale faces of women and children to whom a day in green fields would have been a day to remember. In this respect Mary resembled them, and it was strange that this link of human kinship did not enlist their sympathies. It must have been that from some inherent failing she did not know how to approach them, otherwise she would surely have made friends. Like begets like, it is true; and it is a singular circumstance that in so many instances like should repel like. Mary's timid and retired habits and

her gentle gait and demeanour were construed by her neighbours into wilful avoidance. "We are not good enough for her," they said; and as her manners touched their pride (which in some classes is always red and inflamed, like "proud flesh"), so her clothes excited their envy. It was scarcely that they were of finer material than their own, but that they were of a better and different fashion in the make, and that they were better worn. Mary, despite the trials she had gone through, had still managed to preserve some odd remnants of her more flourishing days, before she met and loved Warren. Philippa was now growing into a very lovely young woman, and she and her mother looked like ladies as they went to and fro. Such was the verdict passed upon them by their equals in social position; and to be a lady, without the visible means to support the position, is not accepted with favour by poor people, who have a most particular aversion to those of their class who "give themselves airs."

Here it is necessary to say that the vague rumours which, fifteen years ago, had dimly associated the name of Earnshaw with the death of Michael Featherstone were no longer heard. But the flames were not entirely quenched; the ashes were piled above them, but the invisible fire was there, buried beneath the weight of years.

The Earnshaws, then, lived among the people, but were not of them. They lived a life apart, and had no share in the joys and sorrows other than their own by which they were surrounded. This sprang not from selfishness, but from concentrativeness; not because they lacked compassion for the sufferings of their neighbours, but because their own lives were full and complete. Of pathetic stories of human error and back-sliding, of sickness and death, the neighbourhood was full, as all poor neighbourhoods are; and these as a rule, mere common stock, themes for gossip and comment in every family but the family of the Earnshaws. This, as it were, cut them off from their fellows. Other children did not associate with them. Dick and Raymond, Sally and Philippa—how could such names be harmoniously coupled? Therefore Dick chummed with Bill, as was natural, and fought and made friends with him; and Sally and Mary Jane swore eternal friendship, and made mud-pies in sweet companionship. From these pleasures of the gutter our children were debarred, and

stood thereby a better chance of keeping themselves clean, which in itself was something of an offence, as an indication of aristocratic proclivities. "A little wholesome dirt would do them no harm," said the neighbours. Mary thought otherwise, and gathered her treasures close to her, and worked on through the months and the years, and taught her children a little the while she piled her needle. Everything she did was fraught with a tenderness which gave it a special charm, and the lessons, as she taught them, were the reverse of irksome to the children. So that Philippa and Raymond learned to read and write. Arithmetic was beyond the mother's scope. All the knowledge she had of figures was that so many pence made a shilling, and so many shillings a pound; and that so much money would buy so many loaves of bread.

Part of the arrangement of the two rooms in which they had lived so long has already been described. The front room was their living-room, and in a corner was set the screen behind which was the table at which old Mr. Earnshaw made his penny toys at the end of his day's wanderings in the western thoroughfares of the City. Here, also, at ten o'clock every night, was made the bed in which the old man and Raymond slept. The inner room was the sleeping apartment of Mary and Philippa. In this room it was that Mary chiefly worked, and often while her children slept and dreamed did the breadwinner, needle in hand, hear the tolling of the midnight hour. Then would solemn thoughts arise in Mary's mind, and she would suspend her work awhile and reflect upon the mystery of life, and upon the day when she and her dead husband and all of her blood who held a place in her heart would be united again in the world of eternal peace and love. One abiding memory was present to her on these occasions, the happy fancies of her dream on the last night she and Warren were together fifteen years ago. It was not to be—it was never to come true, for Warren was gone. But her Philippa and Raymond, then babes, were now man and woman, as bright, as beautiful, and as good as her dream had pictured them. She would rise and look on them in their sleep, and her heart would overflow with gratitude that they had been spared to her. It was not at midnight that sadness oppressed her; but there was one portion of the day when her heart was frequently charged with melancholy. It was in the twilight that

the mother's tears fell upon her work, in the soft dim twilight which belongs not to the present or the future, but to the past. Then arose visions of happier days, reminiscences fraught with tender pain, from which her dear lost husband was never absent.

Her bedroom was at the back of the house, and from the windows stretched an apparently interminable perspective of roofs and tiles and angles of buildings, within which the parti-coloured drama of life was being played out, with its accompaniment of smiles and tears, of gladness and despair.

The bread-winner saw the sun rise over the house-tops, saw the day awake and grow busy, saw the moonlight fall upon the roofs, saw the stars shine, saw the City fall asleep. Then when all was still, and the only sound that reached her ears was the peaceful breathing of her children, she would, from sheer weariness, lay aside her lace pillows, and after her nightly prayer, in which Warren's name was always remembered, would place herself quietly by the side of her Philippa, and yield to slumber, to wake again at early morn and resume her work. How often, when Philippa was dressing while Mary was preparing breakfast, did she find occasion to say :

"Mother, a fairy has been busy again at my clothes."

"Indeed, my dear !" Mary would reply, with a bright smile.

"Ah, but, mother," Philippa would say, "you should not, indeed you should not ! Why, you must have been up half the night."

"What a strange idea !" Mary would say. "Fairy fingers can do mending in no time."

With Raymond's clothes and grandfather's it was the same ; however poorly they were dressed, there was never a rent in their garments. Philippa was not by nature indolent, nor did she ever consciously impose upon her mother's goodness, but it was one of Mary's sweetest pleasures to stitch and mend for those she loved. Philippa was beginning to learn how to make lace, and Raymond had a situation which brought in a few shillings a week.

From the window of Mary's bedroom the children had been in the habit of watching the signs in earth and heaven, and of asking questions which the mother was puzzled to answer, and talking to each other of this and that. The stars to them, as to all children, were a source of wonder, and they loved to gaze

at the weird shadows which played over the roofs as the clouds passed across the face of the moon ; but, most of all, upon the evidences of life in the near and distant windows. Flower-pots and boxes on the sills were to them a never-ending field of interest ; the sowing of the seed, even though it were as humble as mustard-and-cress, the planting of a few crocuses, the bringing home of a pot of geranium, or a bunch of wallflowers in a broken jug—all were marked.

There was one little window which was a perfect bower all the year round, with its climbing plants and daisies, and creeping-jenny, and nasturtiums, and all the lowly flowers of easy growth. This bower was the property of an elderly man, whose morose unshaven face would have led you to believe that he was the last person in the world who would take an interest in these things ; but he loved them—they were his only friends.

Then there were bird-cages with their feathered prisoners hanging against the walls ; girls and women working in garrets, men smoking in their shirt-sleeves ; the pulling down of the blinds at night and the shadows on them ; the aged woman propped up by pillows in a rickety armchair, who sat from morning to night staring dumbly at the sky, as though looking for the summons that would set her free—all these were matters of deep interest to the children, and afforded them delight.

Occasionally a more solemn interest was attached to these human surroundings : as at the death of a child with whom they were mutually familiar ; the coffin with a few flowers upon it, the mourners, the bearing away of the clay, the return of the parents—the bereaved mother white and still, the father drawing consolation from his pipe.

Thus had the years worn on, and so sweetly and patiently did Mary bear the burden of life that her children felt not its weight. They shared her pleasures, but not her griefs. In their earlier years she thought of their future ; it was far away, and she was sufficiently happy in being able to provide food for them. There are flowers of human experience which never fade. When Philippa and Raymond began to babble, their voices conveyed to her heart a sweetness so enthralling that sorrow held no place in her world. Her soul lay in joy, as the heavens lie in the lap of summer clouds. Her humble rooms were a temple fit for angels to worship in.

And even in the days when worldly necessities pressed heavily upon her, her lot was not too hard to bear. Things always came right, and she obtained sufficient for the simple wants of her little family; her willing heart aided her willing hands in their labour of love; and there is a sacred sweetness in sad memories which contain no shame.

Those days of early childhood were now past, and life's more pregnant pages were opening for Philippa and Raymond.

It was at this momentous period that Mary received a warning in which new troubles were shadowed forth. It came to her first upon a bright summer morning, when she was busy upon a very delicate pattern of lace-work, a special order from the firm by which she was principally employed. She was in gay spirits because the little commission was to be more than usually profitable to her, and she was scheming how she should spend the two or three extra shillings she was to receive for it. She had arranged it all in her mind—a ribbon for Philippa's hat, a necktie for Raymond, a piece of new flannel to make a chest-preserver for grandfather—when raising her head for a moment, she saw in the air the piece of lace upon which she was working. In surprise she looked down, and her lace was in her lap; its airy semblance had vanished. She smiled at the illusion, and thought it pretty and graceful.

But a few days afterwards she was puzzled at the repetition of the fancy, which as time went on was repeated with greater frequency, and became an annoyance to her. Presently she was visited by other signs distressing to her sight, but she paid no serious heed to the warning until an aching pain crept into her eyes which cautioned her to delay no longer. Among the beautiful growths which sweeten the fever of the great cities, none are more beautiful than hospitals for the poor. To one of these, suitable to her case, the mother went, and consulted a physician. He, over-burdened as he was by duties, saw in an instant that the applicant standing before him was a lady of gentle culture, and that she was battling with poverty. He examined her eyes with the ophthalmoscope, and then, conducting her into a darkened room, tested them with straight and diagonal lines, and with reading matter in types of various sizes. The examination at an end, he said:

"You have trifled with a most precious gift."

"I do not understand you," replied Mary, a vague terror

stealing upon her, not so much from his words as from the impressive and sympathetic tone in which they were spoken.

The physician explained himself.

"You have used your eyes unfairly ; you have put a strain upon them which they are unable to bear. Have you been in the habit of reading very small print by an imperfect light ?"

"No, sir ; I have no time for reading."

"Yet you yourself have been the cause of the mischief. Why ?"

A commoner nature would have answered, "To provide food for my children ;" but Mary's answer was conveyed in an involuntary quivering of the lips and a convulsive twitching of the muscles of her lips. In the midst of her agitation she unconsciously raised her hand to her forehead, and softly rubbed her brows, an action which had become common to her without her being aware of it. This grave symptom was attentively observed by the physician.

"Have you any pain over your eyes ?"

"Not at present," she replied.

"Why did you raise your hand to your forehead ?"

"Did I do so ?"

"Yes."

"I was not aware of it," said Mary ; and again she raised her hand and rubbed her brows.

"You are doing so now."

Being thus called to conscious observance of her action—a habit with many whose sight is affected—Mary kept her fingers from betraying her again by interlacing them tightly.

"If you do not read at night," said the physician, "you work."

"Sometimes."

"Very often," said the physician, correcting her with gentle firmness ; "and of course in the day as well."

"Yes."

"For how many hours out of the twenty-four are you engaged upon your work ?"

Mary did not reply, and he did not press the question.

"Is it fine needlework upon which you are employed ?" he asked.

"It is lacework."

"I thought as much ; and you work at night by the light

of one candle. Occasionally you see your lace floating in the air."

"How do you know?" she cried.

His prophetic insight was filling her with despair.

"My dear lady," he replied with a smile, not of superior wisdom but of genuine pity, "if I did not know, what would be the use of your coming to me? Unfortunately, yours is not an isolated case. Your eyes require absolute rest; you must put aside your work for a few weeks at least."

"It is impossible," she murmured.

"A sojourn in the country," he continued, as though he had not heard, "where the eye rests chiefly upon natural colour, would be beneficial. Upon your return you can come and see me again, and we will see what can be done. But even then," he added gravely, for he saw clearly that he was giving impracticable advice, "I cannot say with confidence that your sight will be saved."

The shock of this news caused a faintness to come over her; she thought of her children when they would have no mother to protect them, of her dear ones so poorly armed for life's battle. The physician gave her a glass of water. He was accustomed to the sight of human suffering, but he was not callous to it.

"I cannot go into the country," she said.

"You have no friends there?"

"None."

He did not inquire into her circumstances; her presence in the hospital was a sufficient indication.

"Shall I grow blind?" she presently asked.

"If you continue your work," he said in a gentle tone, "and do not follow my instructions, I am afraid it must be so."

"I *must* continue my work."

He urged her no more, perceiving not only that it was useless, but that it occasioned her deeper suffering; he saw that the woman had the courage of a martyr.

"Speak to me, I beg of you!" she implored.

"What can I say?" he remarked. "To buoy you up with false hopes would be exceedingly wrong. Have you anyone dependent on you?"

"My children and my father. They have no one but me. Do not be angry with me. You *will* help me, will you not? You will give me something to strengthen my sight!"

"I can relieve you for a time, but I cannot cure you. The possibility of cure rests with yourself."

He gave her a lotion, and with kind and considerate words bade her come again the following week.

That night Mary pressed her children closer to her breast, and kissed them frequently. They did not wonder, and had no suspicion of anything unusual. Tenderness with their mother was a second nature, and it was as natural for her to express it as it is natural for the dew to fall.

CHAPTER XI.

MARY RECEIVES A LETTER FROM THE PHYSICIAN.

DURING the next few months Mary paid periodical visits to the hospital, and did not give her eyes an hour's rest. Indeed, she could not, for various reasons. Her employers were not satisfied with some very fine lacework she did for them, and they gave her work of a coarser kind, the remuneration for which was lower than that she had been accustomed to. This meant longer hours and more severe pinching in her purchases for the household. Often on Saturday night, after buying what was necessary for the wants of the family, she had but a shilling or two left to commence the next week with. Perhaps she was not always as wise as she might have been, but she so loved Philippa that she could not deny her certain modest indulgences to which youth has a fair claim. Then, during these last few months, Raymond lost his situation; his master failed in business, and the lad was thrown out of employment. It was unfortunate for the children that they had not been brought up in a practical manner; they were, in truth, utterly unfit to cope with the world. Push on—push on! That is the motto of the day, and it is not only by the strong, but by the braggart, that the weak are thrust to the wall. Raymond's gentle and retiring bearing rendered his quest of a new situation all the more difficult.

At first the remedies which the physician gave Mary for her failing sight had a beneficial effect; they brought relief to her, and she was very buoyant and hopeful; but gradually they seemed to lose their virtues. She was haunted by phantasmagoria; objects swam before her eyes, and the dull aching pain became more intense, and was now occasionally accompanied by sharp shootings. Still Mary did not despair. She was so utterly unworldly as to believe in Divine interposition in human affairs. Of a man who was prosperous and a wrong-doer she would say, "God will punish him." So of herself, when she thought of the physician's continued warnings, she said, "God

will not permit it. He will not take the bread out of my children's mouths." At length, on one of her visits to the hospital, the physician spoke to her even more gravely than usual. She complained that the lotion did not relieve her, and entreated him to give her a stronger remedy. But he had done all that science could possibly do for her in her position, and he told her so gently and firmly ; and told her, moreover, that unless she ceased her work immediately she would be blind in less than three months. She looked up into his face with a sweet smile, and asked :

"Do you believe in God?"

The question startled him—an effect produced by the poor lady's manner of uttering it. It was as though to the bright blade of science she opposed the invulnerable shield of faith.

Scarcely had she uttered the words before a full remembrance of the good doctor's kindness rushed upon her, and she said pleadingly :

"Ah, forgive me, forgive me; and don't think me ungrateful!"

With wise insight he pierced the depths of the mother's soul, and as he saw its throbbing and suffering, within his own occurred a conflict of pity and duty. It would almost be merciful, he thought, to send her away, and bid her come no more ; but pity prevailed, and he said :

"We will still see if something cannot be done."

How grateful she was ! Had he allowed her, she would have kissed his hand.

That night at home he spoke of the case to his wife, and told her how strangely he was interested in it. "I have always contended," he said, "that those who are born in poverty are far happier than those who sink into it from misfortune." He studied Mary's case with great earnestness, and tried new remedies, which did her no good. She would have broken down had it not been for the medicine of prayer. It comforted and beguiled her, and when she saw the phantoms of her lace-work in the air she prayed them away. Day and night she continued her labour, occasionally missing her stitches and marring her designs, and being reproved by her employers. Unable herself to detect any flaw in her work, she believed them unjust. They had no suspicion that blindness was stealing upon her, nor did her children suspect it. With the cunning of unselfishness she kept her secret to herself.

One morning at the hospital, while she was waiting her turn to go into the physician's room, the attendant called her out and gave her a letter. It was as follows :

“DEAR MADAM,

“It is with the greatest regret that I am compelled by my duty to the numerous other poor patients who call upon me, to inform you that in the circumstances of your case I can do nothing more for you. I beg you to believe that you have my deep sympathy, but to uselessly employ time which can be occupied in the actual relief of the sufferings of others, would be an injustice to those who are labouring under affliction. As kindly as it is in my power I wish to point this out to you, and from my experience of you I am confident you will recognise that no other course is open to me. To afford you relief has been a most earnest desire with me, and it is with sorrow I confess that I have come to the end of my resources. What little skill I possess will no longer avail you. Your case is one which needs the advice of the most eminent oculist, and even he (I say it with pain) would be unable to fully save your sight. I greatly fear you have allowed the disease to go too far. If it should happily lie in your power some time within the next few weeks to consult such an authority (whose address I am prepared to give you, should you desire it), you must be ready to obey the absolute injunction he would lay upon you to discontinue your needle work. The last lotion I gave you is the best prescription I can advise, and I have given instructions to the dispensary department of the hospital to supply you with it so long as you choose to apply for it.

“Believe me, with deep commiseration, to be truly yours,

“CHARLES HOWARD.”

Accompanying the letter was a cheque for three guineas.

It was with difficulty she read the inexorable words. They swam before her eyes as a sentence of death might have done. But a sentence of death swiftly carried out would have been merciful in comparison. Her pain, then, would soon be over ; whereas now she was to live and suffer hour by hour, God's sweet light of earth growing dimmer and dimmer, until it was forever shut from her sight. Not for herself did she murmur. Suffering

she had borne, and could bear, and were she alone in the world she could bear this last great affliction with resignation. But her children were to be left without a protector, without food, unless they received it at the hands of charity ! The thought of charity turned her attention to the cheque which the doctor enclosed in his letter. She looked at it, and a deep blush crimsoned her face. Kind as was the feeling which prompted the gift, it brought a sense of humiliation with it. She had never in her life received charity ; all through the long laborious years she had been enabled by the labour of her hands to provide for her dear ones. Could she stoop now to receive charity at a time when her humble home was not in actual want ? She was not yet quite penniless, and she could not bear that her children should eat bread that had not been earned by labour. That necessity might arise—yes, with throbs of grief and shame she was compelled to admit it—but it was not now. Some weeks of sight remained to her, some weeks of work, which she would perform all the more zealously because the time was so short. Who knew what might happen before then ? She had never yet been left entirely forsaken and desolate. Something would happen—yes, something good would happen. “I will pray—I will pray !” she murmured. In the meantime she could not compromise her children ; they should still be able to say, “We have lived by honest labour.” No, she could not accept the good doctor’s money. A casuist might have pointed out to her that she had already accepted charity by going to the hospital, instead of consulting a doctor and paying him, and that she was drawing a distinction without a difference ; but she was not subtle enough for this to occur to her.

She went from the hospital to a little newspaper-shop, and, buying a sheet of paper and an envelope for a penny, asked for the loan of pen and ink. In the shop she wrote the following letter to the doctor :

“DEAR SIR,

“I can offer you nothing but my most heartfelt thanks for all your kindness. I shall bear it in grateful remembrance all my life. It would indeed be unjust and cruel for me to waste your time, which can be so mercifully occupied in the alleviation of the sufferings of other poor people. Do

not be offended with me for returning your cheque. I am not in want, and I am still able to work. I put my trust in God, and I will pray to Him to bless you for your goodness to me.

“Your grateful servant,

“MARY EARNshaw.”

Returning to the hospital, she handed in this letter, and proceeded on her way home.

CHAPTER XII.

PETER LAMB.—HOME AGAIN.

HER thoughts continued to run upon her children and their future, as it would be affected by the calamity by which she was threatened. Her doom was spoken, and Philippa and Raymond were to be thrown upon the waves of pitiless circumstance, to be wrecked, perhaps, as others had been wrecked, by their own ignorance and the treachery of mankind. What was to become of her boy, simple and trustful; of her girl, blooming with dangerous beauty? Hitherto, her love had been a shield to them, and now, when they most needed it, they were to be deprived of her protection. She would be unable to see the pitfalls in their path, and powerless to save them.

For the first time in her life a kind of rebellion entered her soul. Why was she to be thus punished? Had she not already suffered enough? Why were those she loved best in the world to be endangered because of the affliction which was falling upon her? This sullen rebellion, however, did not last long; in such a nature as hers it could not find a permanent home.

Her better mood did not soften the pang of the shock she had received. As she walked homeward the anguish of her mind had its effect. The houses, the sky, the people, faded from her sight, and she groped with her hands in dumb despair. Had it come so soon, so soon!

The busy crowd, hurrying this way and that, had no eyes, no mind, no compassion for her. Some pushed against her, not intentionally, but from self-engrossment, and she stumbled and fell upon the pavement.

A little knot of people gathered around her, and looked down and laughed, and made their comments. The exhibition of a tipsy woman in the streets was unhappily not uncommon. The riders on the tops of the omnibuses craned their necks forward, not in sympathy but amusement. A cabdriver pointed his

whip at her, with a grin on his face. A man who had had too much to drink stopped and gazed upon her reprovingly. Not one person attempted to assist her. She managed to regain her feet, and stood, her body swaying to and fro; in that moment of anguish, one word escaped her lips; a whispered word drawn from the dim past—"Warren!"

Ay, the intervening years had melted away, and her appeal went back to her once human protector. Her eyes were wide open, but all was dark before her; she stretched forth her hands and they came into trembling contact with the arm of a man. He shook them off, and was about to walk on when he observed the despair in her face.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked.

"I cannot see," she moaned.

A by-stander laughed incredulously and mockingly, and the surrounding people took up the cue and laughed with him. Mary raised her face appealingly to her protector; it was a sufficient answer to the cruel laugh.

"Hold on to me," he said. "Now then, you land-sharks, what are you staring at?"

"What's that to you?" asked a boy impudently.

"You want to know, my lad?"

"Yes, old salt junk."

"Belay, then!" cried the man.

He was a sailor who had seen his fifty years at least, on land and sea. He could boast of a rolling gait, a good-humoured countenance, a merry eye, and a wooden leg. Whether it was that a special terror was conveyed in the words "Belay, then!" or that an aggressive movement on the part of the sailor indicated that he was preparing for action, or that a tremulous motion of the wooden leg was regarded as a danger signal, certain it is that the impudent boy put his hands in his pockets, set up a whistle, and straightway walked off. The male portion of the crowd followed suit: it set up a whistle, put its hands in its pockets, and walked off. The female portion also dispersed. A mob in a London street resembles a flock of sheep; it only requires a leader to jump and bleat, or to stand stock still and look foolishly wise, or to run to the right or left. "Poor thing!" says the leader; "Poor thing!" says the mob. "He's a thief!" says the leader; "He's a thief!" says the mob. It is all one to General Mob, so long as it hasn't got to think for itself.

When they were alone, the sailor first indulged in a laugh, and then addressed Mary :

"Where are you bound for?" he asked.

"Bound for?" she echoed, not understanding the question.

"What part of this lonely city are your sailing papers made out for?" he said, altering the form of his inquiry.

"I am going home," she said. "I have been to the hospital for my eyes, and a blindness came suddenly upon me."

"Not really blind, then?"

"No, thank God, not yet!" The mournful tone in which she uttered the last two words roused keen sympathy in the sailor's heart.

"Awhile ago a heavy fog crept up—from the Channel, I think," he said, with the air of a man who deemed it his duty to be precise; and as he spoke, he indicated, with out-stretched hand, the exact direction of the Channel. "But the signs are good; it'll not last much longer, trust my judgment for it. It'll clear off presently—it's clearing off now."

Mary closed her eyes and opened them, and a grateful sob escaped her when she found that she could see dimly.

"Thank you," she said, "I am better."

She would have left him, but he was not to be so easily disposed of. He edged closer to her.

"Fogs are treacherous things," he said. "I've had experience of 'em, and well-nigh lost my life in one. What has happened to me on sea may happen to you on land, unless you make all taut in good time. Take an old sailor's arm."

His manner was fatherly, and intended to convey respect. Mary felt the need of assistance, but was chary of accepting it from a stranger. He solved the difficulty by placing her hand on his arm.

"If my old mother was here," he said, "belike she'd be jealous of you."

"You have a mother?" said Mary.

"I had," he answered, "but she's gone aloft. My way is your way, my lass, till I leave you at your door. I ship myself in your service. Peter Lamb on the books—able-bodied seaman."

There was so much that was hearty and genuine, and so much that was pleasant and whimsical about this gallant tar, that she allowed him to accompany her without further demur.

"You follow the sea," she said.

"It would be a truer word," said Peter Lamb, "to say that the sea follows me. Here it is now all around me flowing, flowing, flowing. Tide rises : morning. Tide at its full : noon. Tide falls : night. Because my bunk is at the top of the house—I slept in it last night for the first time—a landsman might suppose it was high and dry. Not a bit of it ; and I knew better the moment I tumbled in. There was the sea a-singing in my ears, and presently it began to creep up the stairs. By the time I was asleep there wasn't a coast-line within a thousand miles of me. My first night ashore—no wonder I had dreams ! If a man with a brush could have dived into my mind he could have painted rare pictures. Pardon me, my lass. I said awhile ago that I was an able-bodied seaman. I made a big mistake, for that ain't possible with only five toes."

A loquacious old salt this Peter Lamb, but it seemed a comfort to him to have some one to talk to.

"I'm something else," he continued, "besides a sailor. You'd like to know what, perhaps. Well, a lonely man. I've been a sailor for nigh on forty year, and have had a taste of danger many a time and again. Would you believe it now ? I was on a raft once for thirteen days and fourteen nights ; me and two others. It might have been worse, you'll say ; the other two was company. But what'll you say when I tell you the other two was deaf and dumb ? Fact, my lass. A cheerful fortnight was that, with nothing to eat for over ninety hours. On another voyage I was the only one saved, and lived on a rock, me and myself, for a day and a week. A lively look-out, that was. Jolly times ! Why do I speak of 'em ? Well ; for a reason. Because for loneliness"—he turned his head about, and looked in a distant manner at the ever changing faces surging around him—"for real right down loneliness, give me a city like London. An iceberg in the North Pole is a garden to it."

"Are you going to sea again ?" asked Mary.

He thrust forward his wooden leg.

"A wooden leg and a slippery deck is a matrimonial conjunction that's bound to come to grief. No ; me and the sea has paid our last adoos."

It appeared to strike him here that he was talking too much, so he pegged away in silence at Mary's side, with his eye upon the full tide, and convoyed his charge as he would a ship

sailing in dangerous waters ; tacking about in fashion so eccentric as to draw upon himself much attention ; and muttering at suitable points of the cruise :

"'Bout ship !" "In the rapids, again !" "Luff, you lubber, luff !"

Mary broke the silence between them, fearing that he might think her churlish for not speaking, by remarking that as he said he was a lonely man, she supposed he lived alone.

A merry look was in his eyes as he replied :

"Not exactly what you'd call alone, my lass, and not exactly what you'd call company. Under my hatches there's room for two, and two there is. If you care to know what the other's like, give the word."

"Tell me," said Mary.

"He's a monkey. Barbery his name is, and it's my opinion he thinks he can sail a ship. Because why? Because other monkeys think so. What are you stopping for?"

"This is my street. I live a few doors down."

"Are you sure you can see your way?"

"Yes, indeed. My sight is quite strong now. You have been very kind to me. I thank you."

"Which means," said Peter Lamb, "that I'm adrift again. Well, it has been a pleasant cruise. Pay me off."

Mary trembled. She had other need for the little money in her purse.

"Don't misjudge me, my lass," said Peter Lamb.

He held out a horny hand with a meaning there was no mistaking. Mary placed her hand in his, and he shook it heartily. Then sheered off, with never a look behind.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. PENNYFOLD, ALDERMAN AND MAGISTRATE.

ON the evening of the day on which Dr. Howard received Mary Earnshaw's letter in which his cheque for three guineas was returned, there sat round his dinner-table a dozen guests, among them being a recent acquaintance of his and an old acquaintance of ours, Mr. Pennyfold. This gentleman had blossomed into a City banker and an alderman; he had grown richer; but he still followed his hobby, the pursuit of philanthropy in connection with the poorer classes. He found ample scope for his studies in that direction.

As a City magistrate a new field was opened to him: and he sat regularly on the bench and oracularly delivered himself. When he walked or rode along Cheapside he felt himself somebody, and in his movements, with his head in the air, he acted up to the full height of his dignity.

It was a source of great satisfaction to him and his family, in his capacity of magistrate, that he was regularly reported in the newspapers: and if now and then some eccentric or overstrained decision provoked mild satirical comment, he and his were happily unconscious of the sting, regarding editorial attention of any kind as a mark of popularity and position. Herein the thickness of his skin rendered him unconsciously wise.

"If they think I am angry with them," he would exclaim, "for pitching into me, they are very much mistaken. Show me the public man they don't pitch into. Why, they pitched into Palmerston and Disraeli! They didn't mind it, not they; no more do I. We row in the same boat—Palmerston, Disraeli, and Pennyfold. A very good firm, I should say. The fact is, in these days, if you are not pitched into you are nobody."

Thus it may be said of him, as of few others, that he had achieved his ambition.

The most distinguished of Dr. Howard's guests was Sir William Wentworth, a gentleman whose scholarly attainments and powers of keen observation of men and things had elevated

him into a power. He sat on Dr. Howard's right hand ; Mr. Pennyfold sat at the lower end of the table.

Dinner was over, and there was a buzz of conversation. Mr. Pennyfold was holding forth on his favourite theme ; Sir William and his host were quietly conversing.

"What is the latest news of Philip Raven?" asked Dr. Howard.

"He is still engaged in his task," replied Sir William ; "his heart and soul are in it. The strange by-ways he is traversing have taken powerful hold of him."

"An enthusiast," remarked Dr. Howard. "I have lately had an experience which would interest him, and which, I confess, has not only interested but deeply touched me. As it has come to me professionally, the name of my patient must be a secret, and I can only refer to the case in a general way. We doctors are depositories of many solemn confidences and of much that is sacred. The fibres of our hearts should be of steel."

"It happens that you are human. Is your patient rich or poor?"

"Poor. A lady struggling bravely, and working fatally, day and night, for those dependent on her."

"Working fatally!"

"It will, at all events, shortly bring upon her a calamity which will be as bitter as death. The phrase is wrong, for death, to her, would be merciful in comparison."

"Those dependent upon her—are they unable to help themselves?"

"I judge so from her words. I am of the opinion, though she has not told me so much, that she keeps her sufferings from the knowledge of her family."

"It would not be right for me to inquire the nature of her malady."

"I may mention it without breach of confidence. She will soon be blind."

"Poor creature! and blindness will render her powerless."

"Utterly. She earns her bread by lace-work."

"My dear Howard, give me an opportunity. My purse is at your disposal."

"It is this phase of the case which has deepened my compassion. I have had almost to break her heart to-day by writing to her that I can do nothing more for her professionally, and that

there are so many pressing demands upon me by other unfortunates whose ills I can relieve, that I cannot inflict injustice upon them by wasting further time on her."

"Strict justice," said Sir William thoughtfully, "and yet—a whipcord at red heat cutting into the woman's heart."

"Not only strict justice, but stern duty. To turn from it would be to bring despair upon other suffering persons."

"I recognise the duty. Proceed."

"I wrote the letter carefully, and in the letter I enclosed a cheque."

"It was like you."

"Bear in mind that my patient is really and truly poor, and is in sore need of money. What will you say when I tell you that she wrote me a most moving reply, and returned my cheque?"

"A rare and touching experience. Yes, Philip Raven would be deeply interested in such a case. You have called him an enthusiast; he is something more than that. He is a man earnestly desirous of doing good, and he believes he is taking the practical road to its accomplishment. I have a letter from him in my pocket which I will show you before I leave. Certain reviewers of his last book have accused him of importing sentimental views into the subject to which he has devoted his life; therefore he resolved to see and judge for himself. Though he has but little need to take that course, for he has a sufficient fund to draw upon in the circumstances in which he himself was born."

"His family were very poor, you have told me."

"His parents were common labouring people, who tasted meat probably not oftener than once a week. The house they occupied in a little village in Kent had three rooms in it; the rent was six pounds a year. The father's wages were twelve shillings for six days long and hard labour, and he was frequently out of work. I know of one severe winter during which he was laid on a bed of sickness, and did not earn a shilling. His neighbours were no better off, so that Philip Raven, who lived with his people till he was long past manhood, can honestly claim to belong to the ranks of which he writes. I have made you acquainted with the manner in which he and I became associated. When he was a child my horse ran over him in a country lane, and I am the cause of his being a life

cripple. I could do no less than make amends to him for the calamity I brought upon him. I never lost sight of him, and when I found he was greedy for books, I supplied him with them. He is almost entirely self-taught, and you would be astonished at the extent of his acquirements. Upon the death of his parents he came to London at my invitation, and continued his studies here. He discovered his star and followed it, and is already celebrated. He has amused me by declaring that the most fortunate hour of his life was that in which I maimed and crippled him."

"There is something romantic in his career," observed Dr. Howard.

"There is something romantic in the careers of most men. I look round your table, and I perceive in every one of your guests a justification for my statement. Do I detect a touch of incredulosity in your face? Well, I will select as an instance the least likely man present, Mr. Pennyfold, banker, alderman, and magistrate."

"Surely," said Dr. Howard, smiling, "you can strike no spark of romance out of his prosaic life."

"In all seriousness, his presence at your table, in the heart of fashionable London, is in itself a romantic and remarkable episode. Were you, as I am, acquainted with the particulars of his early life when his parents—common, worthy souls—were amassing wealth for him—were it possible for those worthy progenitors of his to appear, in their habit as they lived, behind his chair, you would be filled with amazement and he with consternation. All romances are not of a rosy hue. Somebody has said it takes all sorts to make a world; each being is so dependent upon the other that most of us would be twisted out of all recognisable likeness to our reputed selves if the truth were hammered into us and veritably exemplified. The philanthropist owes a debt of gratitude to the thief for existing. The presence of the one skulking along the streets in search of prey glorifies the other, who shall have a monument erected in his honour when he is dead. Reputation is made, not so much by the possession of qualities in the man who gains it, as by the possession of opposite qualities in his neighbours. Here comes a seasonable digression from my dry philosophies. I think Mr. Pennyfold is speaking of Philip Raven's book."

Mr. Pennyfold had, indeed, seized upon the theme, and was thus delivering himself :

"I have read this book entitled 'Certain Social Aspects,' have read it carefully, and it is my deliberate opinion that the author is completely ignorant of his subject. Such books are mischievous—I have no hesitation in saying exceedingly mischievous."

"Because," asked Sir William Wentworth, addressing Mr. Pennyfold in a low, clear tone, "they bring into the light pictures of life which have hitherto been too much in the background? Is it for that reason you declare Mr. Raven's book to be mischievous?"

Mr. Pennyfold flushed with pleasure. To be thus prominently drawn into discussion by a man so renowned as Sir William Wentworth was a mark of distinction. He was, as it were, chosen from all as the one most worthy to break a lance with.

"Why should they be brought into light at all, Sir William?" he said deferentially.

"Then you admit their existence," said Sir William quietly. "I thought you were disputing it."

Mr. Pennyfold hastened to extricate himself from the pit into which he had fallen. "No, Sir William, no; I do *not* admit their existence—I do *not* admit the correctness of Mr. Raven's views."

"Pardon me again," said Sir William, very courteously, "but I understood you were not questioning his views, but his facts. I beg you to excuse me if I am mistaken."

"If his facts are wrong," said Mr. Pennyfold, "his views follow suit."

"That being admitted, you have first to disprove his facts."

"I believe *I* am an authority on the subject of the poor," said Mr. Pennyfold, with a pompous look around. "I have studied it all my life. The poor are brought before me every day—costermongers who *will* block up the streets, busmen who *will not* move on, cab-drivers who *will* crawl along, people who *will* beg, others who *will* hawk without a license, men, women, and boys, who *will* pick pockets. I know the ins and outs of the class; I am awake to all their tricks. When they come before me I reckon them up with half an eye, and they know it. Strong measures, Sir William, strong measures, nothing else

will do in dealing with them. Sentiment is poison, rank poison."

"You do not speak lovingly," observed Sir William.

"As a surgeon uses his knife, Sir William," retorted Mr. Pennyfold, with inward felicitation at the appropriateness of the illustration.

"The examples you have advanced," said Sir William, "do not affect Mr. Raven's social pictures, and therefore do not disprove his facts. I am afraid we are occupying different platforms in this discussion. As a magistrate, you deal with effect; as a humanitarian, Mr. Raven deals with cause. He is studying mysteries which you are not called upon to examine. You simply administer the law."

"And I hope," interposed Mr. Pennyfold loftily, "to the satisfaction of my sovereign."

"I hope so," said Sir William, with a scarcely perceptible smile. "When you deal with beggary and theft you deal with them in connection with acts of beggary and theft. You do not stop to inquire, as Mr. Raven does, what has driven this man to beg and that man to steal."

"It is not my business to do so. As a magistrate I deal with acts and facts."

"Exactly; you deal with what is on the surface. Mr. Raven dives to the depths."

"If Mr. Raven wishes to know what makes men and women thieves and beggars, I can tell him."

"It is what he earnestly wishes to know. You may enlighten him through me."

"Innate viciousness, ingrained idleness. What is bred in the bone, you know. A bad lot, Sir William, a bad lot! I know them thoroughly. Shower benefits upon them, and all you get in return is ingratitude."

"Ah! it is quite certain that you and Mr. Raven would not agree."

"I do not regret it, Sir William. I am satisfied that he had but one object in writing his book."

"And what, in your opinion, may that have been?"

"To make money out of it. He has succeeded, I fear; I am told it has had an enormous circulation."

"You are mistaken in your views of Mr. Raven," said Sir

William Wentworth gravely. "He is a friend whom I honour and esteem."

With that he turned away, and resumed his conversation with Dr. Howard. Later in the evening he gave his host Philip Raven's letter to read.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH.

“MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,—

“I do not give you an address, because I have already shifted my lodgings three times ; nor a date, because I write at odd minutes, and have no certainty of finishing my letter to-day or to-morrow, or later in the week. If you write to me, address to the General Post Office, then I shall be sure to receive your letter.

“When I conceived the idea of moving into a neighbourhood inhabited by very poor people, and of living their life and participating in its pleasures and miseries, I knew that great courage would be required to carry it out. It needs greater courage than I supposed necessary, but though my heart bleeds at what I see, and at what suggests itself in the experiences thrust upon me, I did not over-estimate my strength. I shall be able to gather materials, from the life, for my next book. Need I say that it will make me a much sadder man?

“The work to be done in these lower strata is overwhelming. It needs not one man, but thousands of men. It needs more than thousands of men ; it needs a system, not only large-minded, but large-hearted ; not only wise, but humane in the best and most Christian-like sense of humanity, and in which the services of religion shall be used more for the body than for the soul. Recognising this, I recognise how limited is my power. I must not fret because of that limitation ; what little I can do shall be thoroughly done, and if in my next book I succeed in forcing a lesson of humanity upon minds which otherwise would have been blank upon the subject, it will be as full a reward for my labour as I dare to hope for. To one end I am pledged. I shall live my days, to the last hour of my life, among the poor. There is no possible temptation in the world which can divert me from my purpose. If I were wealthy, I should look upon it as criminal to use my wealth, or any portion of it, for self-luxury. Seeing what I see, feeling as I feel, it seems to me

that I have learnt the true, the only worthy way in which money should be used. 'Ah,' it may be said, 'that is because you are *not* rich.' This remark applied to me would be quite natural, and I could not find fault with it, but I hope and believe it would not be justified by my conduct.

'I should not be the only one, I am happy to say. I have made acquaintance with a priest, who is not ordained, but a true priest, indeed. He is a working mason, skilful, steady, reliable in his trade. He earns on an average two pounds a week; it costs him to live about fifteen shillings, the rest he spends in deeds of benevolence. A vision, sceptics will say, a creation, a delusion. No, dear sir, a fact—a living embodiment of the principles of Christianity. Were he truly a priest in high office, he is the one who would sell all he had to give to the poor. He will not allow me to know him intimately. Perhaps by-and-by I may succeed in my wish to become his friend; but at present he associates with no man for any length of time. He converses with no one who does not come within the scope of his self-imposed mission. His name is Richard Freeman. I seem to see the path he is treading—it is flowered with good deeds, and I know where it leads to.

"What shall I say of my experiences? I could give you a number of faithful pictures, but one or two must suffice.

"There are six rooms in the house in which I live. Two of these are let to single men; four are let to married people with families. In this one house thirty-two persons reside, cook, eat, sleep, are trained—for of these thirty-two persons nineteen are children. There is no gas in the house. On dark nights it is inexpressibly gloomy. To mention the word Home, with all the beautiful images it conjures up, in connection with such a tenement, is a mockery. The busy day at an end, where shall the residents go for light and relief? They are not to be obtained in their gloomy apartments, with their wretched adornments of patched walls and broken ceilings. They go to their church—the public-house, gay with tinsel and glitter, bright with shining light. The mother and father within, the child of six, with the baby in her arms, standing at the door, matriculating. As the manhood and womanhood of their parents, so shall theirs be. A miracle were it otherwise.

"A company lately started with benevolent intentions—you know of it, for I see your name among subscribers—has opened

coffee-houses in various parts of poorer London as a rival to the public-houses. The intention is good, the execution a deplorable blunder. I hear that they are already a partial failure, and I am not surprised. The sad coffee colour of the outside walls and of the fittings within, the imperfect way in which they are lighted up, invite failure.

"The people of whom I am speaking require bright light and bright colour. I would have both of the brightest. I would outshine the glitter of the public-houses; for their every one light I would have two; for their shining glasses and polished pewter I would have the prettiest, gayest plates and cups that could be made. The pictures on them and on the walls should be such as would gladden the hearts of woman and child, and through them the heart of man.

"So attractive would I make these places that the young would be irresistibly drawn to them. There should be pictured books and pictured newspapers and serials on the tables—enough for all. Other books and newspapers as well, in smaller quantities.

"My motto should be 'LIGHT.' As moths to the candle which destroys them, so should our poorer ones be drawn to the light and the glitter through which they should be elevated. They would tear the books and picture papers. The next day they should be removed, and new ones put in their place. I would have no signs of untidiness in my temples.

"Wherever there was a corner of street and alley and court which brewers and distillers have not pounced upon, it should be pounced upon by me. I would devote it to the genius of light and beauty; and numbers of men and women would leave their poisonous haunts to bask in a healthier sunshine.

"I would fight the public-houses on their own platform, and, as surely as I live, I would cripple their power for harm-doing.

"This is not a sketch, nor even an outline, of the scheme I would carry out were it in my power. It is simply a reference which will enable you to draw a picture which many men would call Utopian. But it is not Utopian; it is practical and easy of accomplishment. It would need a great expenditure of money, and of course, as a speculation, it would not pay. From a national point of view the profits would be enormous, from a moral point of view priceless. . . .

"Five days have passed since the foregoing was written. I have been deeply engaged on a business which I will relate as briefly as possible.

"There came a knock at my door. Opening it, I saw Richard Freeman. I invited him to enter.

"*'I come for a purpose,'* he said—*'you may be able to help me.'*

"I answered that I should be very glad to do so.

"*'It is a matter,'* he said, *'involving a sacrifice of time to perform a service for a dying woman.'*

"I told him I was ready, and that my time was my own. His was not, he said, or he would not have come to me. He did not speak ungraciously, but appeared anxious that I should believe that he did not intrude upon me from curiosity or any other idle motive. It seems he has formed a not altogether unfavourable opinion of me, and perhaps, also, he wished to test me. At all events, he said that, being in a difficulty, he thought of applying to me.

"He took me to a back room in the house adjoining this. On the bed lay a young woman in delirium. Ill as she was, I saw that she could scarcely have passed her twentieth year. Her hair was thick and abundant, and her features comely and interesting.

"*'She will not last the week out,'* said Richard Freeman, *'in the doctor's opinion. I know nothing more of her than that she lies here sick to death, and calls upon her father. "Father" is the only word she utters: it would be a merciful act to bring her to a sight of him before she closes her eyes for good and all.'*

"*'Has she no friends?'* I asked.

"*'None hereabouts. I have gained an inkling of her story. It is a common one, and sad as common; no need to speak of it or refer to it in the presence of death. But there are men I would like to see roped to a cart's end and lashed through London streets—and I would help to do it.'*

"*'She calls upon her father. Who is he? where is he?'*

"*'That has to be discovered. I have a clue here in a little fortune-telling book belonging to the girl. See, here it is, well-thumbed, denoting that she has often consulted the fates in these false pages in search of lucky omens. Observe these words under-lined, "A dark man loves you; he will cross*

the sea and return during the year, bringing a great fortune with him. You will be happy and have five children. But beware of a fair woman." This is one of the many fortunes upon which she fed.'

" 'But the clue?' I asked.

" 'It is here, on the cover, in her own bad writing. "Jane Wraxhall, Shorne."'

" 'Shorne is in Kent,' I said.

" 'You know it, then?' he said; 'I had no idea where the place was. Is it a town or a village?'

" 'A small village, with few inhabitants.'

" 'The easier the search. I judge that this girl was born there, and it will not be difficult to find her father, and bring him to the death-bed of his child. I would go myself, but I cannot leave my work.'

" 'You wish me to go?'

" 'It was my idea; your time is your own, you say.'

"I expressed my willingness, and I saw that he was pleased. I have an earnest desire to make him my friend; his assistance would be of the greatest value to me. He gave me such particulars of Jane Wraxhall's career as he had gathered. She had been in London seven or eight years, some part of the time in service. That is all that is necessary to set down here. Richard Freeman had learnt by accident of the woman's sickness; it was sufficient for him that she was friendless and penniless, and he stepped in at once to her help. During the time we were in the room but one word issued from her lips, 'Father, father, father!' During that time, also, I had experience of Freeman's practical ways, in his conversation with the doctor who called with medicine, and in the attendance of a woman living in the house, whom he had hired to look after the wants of Jane Wraxhall. And all this had been done by Richard Freeman, without hope of reward, for a person who was an utter stranger to him. Was I not right in calling him a priest?

"I have discovered that there is one thing you must not do in connection with him. You must not thank him, nor refer to his benevolent work in terms of praise. It makes him angry and impatient.

"I went to Shorne on the following day, and soon discovered the family of the Wraxhalls. There were two members only,

Jane's mother and father. The mother was seventy odd, and had been bedridden for fifteen years; she was not in her right mind, and did not understand anything that was said to her. All my efforts to make her understand that her daughter was lying on her death-bed in London only elicited vacant smiles from her. The father was a field labourer, now past work, his age being nearer eighty than seventy. His wits were going, too, but I made him understand that his daughter was in London, and wanted to see him badly. I could not get him to believe, however, that she was dying. This sad fact was lost beneath the pressure of weightier mental matter.

“ ‘And Jinny's in London,’ he quavered, ‘and's sent for me! Well, well! She always said she would. Will you be good enough to take that teapot off the shelf there? That's it, sir. You'll find a letter in it from Jinny to me; it come nigh on three year ago. Read it, sir; there ain't much of it 'xcept to tell me that she's going to be a lady. And it's come true. She's a lady, and's sent for me! Well, well! to think of my going to London! I've never been so fur, never half way there. I'll have to smarten up, and somebody must look after mother. Mrs. Penny 'll do that if I promise her the tea-leaves. I'll promise her, oh, yes, I'll promise her, but she don't get 'em! Mother, d'ye hear me? Your old man's going to London to see our Jinny! She's a lady, is our Jinny! Will yer be good enough to go and fetch Mrs. Penny, sir? She lives three doors off, with two cats that I'd like to choke. Don't say anything to her about the tea-leaves. I'll do that; I must lead up to it gently—gently.’

“I could not bring Mr. Wraxhall away immediately. Being unable to work, he lives upon charity, receiving from some ancient fund four shillings a week and a little flour. He conceived it necessary to obtain permission from the officer who administered the fund, and this proceeding took time. This afternoon I assisted him up the stairs to his daughter's room, and seated him in a chair by her bedside. Nothing has disturbed his idea that she is a lady. The poor neighbourhood, the manifest poverty in his daughter's apartment, the pervading gloom and squalor, have had no effect upon him. He sits by the bed, holding his Jinny's hand, or passing his own over her hair, and murmuring:

“ ‘And Jinny's a lady. Our Jinny's a lady! Well, well!’

“The hired woman was there, and she informed me that there was no hope. Richard Freeman had desired her to tell him when I arrived, and to say to me that he would come to my room when he left work. At seven o'clock in the evening he presented himself, and shook hands with me. That mark of approval was very satisfactory to me. He had been in to see Jane, and he told me that her father had not moved from the bedside, and was still muttering that his Jinny was a lady.

“‘She will die to-night,’ said Freeman. ‘I have in your absence made myself acquainted with her true story. One day I may relate it to you.’

“I inquired whether Jane had been at all conscious of what was passing around her, and he replied, no, but that the doctor had said it was more than probable that she would have a conscious interval before she drew her last breath.

“It happened so. We were both in the room. Only ourselves, the dying woman, and her old father were present. At one o'clock in the morning she opened her eyes, and gazed at the old man.

“‘Father!’ she murmured.

“He did not answer. I bent towards him; his head had fallen upon the pillow, and he was fast asleep. So these two faces faced each other.

“She made an effort to put her arms about him, but she was too weak. Freeman assisted her, and drew her closer to her father. Then he gently lifted the sleeping man's head, and placed Jane's arm under it. Some slight strength came to her, and she drew the worn old face to her breast, where it rested, as a baby's face might have done. Her lips moved, and I had to stoop low to hear what she was saying. It was not ‘father’ now. Another picture was in her heart and mind.

“‘My pretty! my pretty!’ she whispered.

“I looked at Freeman, who, stooping, had also heard the words. His face wore a stern expression, and if there was in mine the dark shadow of an outspoken question—as, indeed, there must have been—he made no response to it.

“And while the life of his child was ebbing away in fond and agonising delusion as to the head which was lying on her breast, the old man slept on, murmuring between the gasps of his wasting breath, ‘Jinny's a lady! Well, well!’

“The silence grew deeper and more solemn, and at three

o'clock came the immortal change. A face of wild and impotent alarm, a long, long shuddering of the strong limbs, then suddenly the lifting of a great weight from the heart, and the transfusion of an ineffable peace into the bold and handsome features—a gasp more of joy than of pain—a hush, and all was over.

“I have asked Freeman to be allowed to share the expenses of the funeral, and he has consented.

“I have just returned from the burial-ground, and in a few minutes shall be on my way to Shorne with the old man. I shall conclude and post this letter before I leave.

“I looked into the grave before the coffin was lowered into it, and saw a coffin already in it—the coffin of a little child. This time Freeman answered the mute inquiry in my face. The mother and her babe lie in one grave.

“Farewell, dear sir, for a few days.

“Faithfully and gratefully yours,

“PHILIP RAVEN.”

CHAPTER XV.

PETER LAMB MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THRIFTY MILLER.

NOT only did not Peter Lamb look behind as he walked away from Mary Earnshaw, but he did not look before. Had he done so, he might in the course of a few moments have discovered that he was at no great distance from his own domicile. Indeed, he and Mary Earnshaw lived within two or three hundred yards of each other; but both his innate delicacy and his ignorance of the locality in which he had engaged lodgings prevented him from becoming aware of the fact. A true sailor was Peter Lamb—a statement which is intended to apply to his moral instincts, the bent of which proclaimed him a gentleman. A certain seclusion of personal habits and a passionate devotion to the sea had contributed to bring into prominent play, when occasion required, the refined and delicate fibres of his moral being. Therefore it was that he was a gentleman in spite of the social sphere in which he was born, and therefore it was that he took no note of the streets as Mary Earnshaw walked towards her humble home.

But as he turned from her, and for many minutes thereafter, strolling along with more of inward retrospection than outward observance, his thoughts dwelt upon her with kindest interest. Thus they ran: “A poor woman, that lass, and better than most. A lady born, mayhap, who has come down in life. The brutes, to laugh and jeer at her! They deserved the cat. A gentler voice I never heard; a sweeter face I never saw. When she looked up at me with her pretty eyes it seemed as if I’d known her all my life—fact being that I never clapped eyes on her till to-day. But she might have been my own sister, or something even nearer than that, I was so drawn to her. Peter Lamb, you’re an old fool!—nothing short of it. What business have you to be thinking of women in that way? Old enough to know better, my lad.”

Then a little while afterwards, her image being still in his mind:

"There's no harm thinking of her—won't hurt her and won't hurt me. You're not only an old fool, my lad, but a lubberly brute in the bargain. There was sorrow in her face. Here she was in trouble and grief, and you sheer off with your pockets full of gold, without as much as offering her the very help she may stand in need of. Why, when I said 'Pay me off,' she trembled and turned white as a ghost. Why? Because the chances are she hadn't a silver bit to bless herself with, and you let her go without as much as saying, 'Here, my lass, let me lend you a pound!' Call yourself a sailor! You're the meanest lubber that ever trod the deck! Forgot, perhaps, that you'd an old mother once yourself, that you made up your mind to be kind to—after she was dead. Pretty kindness, and a pretty sailor you, to think of things when it's too late to do them! Now then, what port are you steering for, my lad?"

This inquiry was addressed to a man between whom and himself a collision had occurred, each running into the other by reason of so rapt a mental communing upon matters in which they were selfishly interested as to render them oblivious of the immediate obligations of a crowded traffic. There was no unkindness in Peter Lamb's voice, but the person he spoke to seemed to detect danger in its bluff, hearty tones, and he held up his right arm as though he expected the words to be followed by a blow. He was a thin man, with a face so preternaturally sharp that he looked the very embodiment of low cunning. He was dressed in broadcloth, and wore black gloves a couple of sizes too large for him. He had not reached his fortieth year, but he looked sixty at least, not by reason of whiteness of hair, though streaks of gray were visible, but of extraordinarily deep experience of the crooked ways of life.

"I beg your pardon," he said cringingly. "I beg you a thousand pardons. Pray don't strike me; my heart is affected, and a blow might be my death. I am ready to make any apology."

"I'm not going to strike you, my lad," said Peter Lamb. "No need to beg my pardon; it was as much my fault as yours. I don't understand these land currents, and I shouldn't walk through them with my eyes on the moon." (As a matter of fact there was no visible moon, but the figure of speech served its purpose.) "I didn't hurt you, did I, my lad?"

"No, not at all, not at all," replied the weazen-faced man. "You are altogether too good, and I am much obliged to you. Good-morning."

"Avast, mate," said Peter Lamb, laying his hand on the man's arm, and so arresting his course. The man shrunk and shivered at the touch, and it was evident that he was easily alarmed. "I've lost my bearings. Mayhap you can tell me where Windmill Street is?"

The man's manner instantly changed; the mere mention of Windmill Street put life and spirit into him.

"There's a Windmill Street down Whitechapel way," he said.

"That's it—near a large hospital."

"Do you live there? I've got property in that street, twelve houses that are almost the ruin of me, they're let so cheap. Then the people run away without paying their rent. It's dreadful, dreadful!"

"I'm sorry for your trouble, mate. Yes, I've taken two rooms there at the top of a house; but I sha'n't run away without paying my rent. You needn't fear that, my lad, if you're my landlord."

"What's the number of the house?"

"That's beyond me; I know the bearings when I'm in the street, and I steer straight into port. I've got a bit of paper in my pocket, a receipt for four weeks' rent in advance. Would you like to see it?"

"I should take it as a great favour, if it's not troubling you too much."

"No trouble, my lad. Here it is." He produced it from a bulky pocket-book, and handed it to the prematurely old man, who read it with grasping, greedy eyes. The receipt was signed by Thomas Mayple. "The man who took my money happened to be in the house collecting rents when I asked the rent."

"Yes, yes; it's all right. The house is mine, but the rent of the rooms is too low; it's shamefully low. Seven shillings a week for two furnished rooms! How is a man to live? I shall die a beggar."

"I gave as much as I was asked. You couldn't expect me to give more, my lad."

"Of course not; but he asked too little. You can afford to pay more, now, can't you? As an honest man you can afford to pay more?"

"Well, as you put it that way, a pound or two wouldn't make me or break me. Being my landlord, what may be your name?"

"Miller—Thrifty Miller. Yours is Peter Lamb, I see."

"Yes, that's the name they gave me, and I see no cause to quarrel with it. How far from where we stand may Windmill Street be?"

"A couple of miles. You are walking away from it."

Peter Lamb laughed.

"And I call myself a navigator! Going west when I ought to go east. That's what you get by wool-gathering. Put me on the right track, my lad."

Thrifty Miller pointed out the way, and devoted a little attention to a study of his new tenant. A thought occurred to him. His small eyes grew smaller, and the puckers in his brows more intense.

"You look like a seafaring man," he said.

"Is that a guess of yours, my lad?" asked Peter Lamb, with an amused twinkle.

"Yes."

"You'd guess wrong if you guessed again."

Thrifty Miller followed out his thought.

"Landed long?"

"Yesterday—with this"—pointing to his wooden leg—"to cheer me."

"You walk as if you're not used to it."

"I'm *not* used to it, and never shall be. 'Tain't likely."

"How old," asked Thrifty Miller, with odd sympathy, "may it be?"

"The Lord only knows! It was a second-hand one, bought in Melbourne half a year ago."

Neither he nor his landlord saw the whimsical incongruity of speaking of a wooden leg as second-hand.

"If you're not comfortable in it," said Thrifty Miller, "I could get you another."

"Why, my lad, do you deal in wooden legs?"

"In anything to turn an honest penny. But we can talk of that another time. You've been to Australia?"

"Aye, my lad."

"To the gold-fields?"

"Yes."

"And to other countries, perhaps. For instance to Africa?"

"Aye, my lad."

"And the Indies?"

"Aye, my lad. And to China and Japan, and all round the South Pacific coast. If I said I'd been all round and all over the world half-a-dozen times, I shouldn't be far from the truth."

"You've picked up some bits of curiosities, I dare say?"

"A few."

"And have got them here in London in your sea-chest?"

"Well guessed."

"I'm a dealer in curiosities—"

"Wooden-leg merchant," interrupted Peter Lamb, laughing, "landlord, dealer in curiosities—anything else, my lad?"

"Yes; I don't mind confessing I'm always on the look-out—obliged to be in these hard times—always ready to lay out my money and turn an honest penny. No harm in that, is there?"

"Not a bit of harm."

"If you feel inclined to sell any of your curiosities, or the lot in one lump—I'm fond of speculating—I might feel inclined to buy. Then we could strike a bargain."

"Aye, my lad, but I don't know that I should feel inclined. I've been a lucky and a saving man, and I'm not in want of money."

"You've plenty, ch?" said Thrifty Miller eagerly; "plenty of money—more than you know what to do with?"

"I can't say that, my lad, but I've got enough."

"I wish I had—I wish I had!" groaned Thrifty Miller. "I am a most unfortunate man. I'm robbed right and left, right and left! I daren't go to sleep for fear of being robbed more."

"That's bad."

"What have you done with your money? You don't keep it about you, do you?" Peter Lamb winked at Thrifty Miller. "It's dangerous. You'll be robbed of every penny of it; you don't know people as I do. You must put it in a bank—in to my bank, and I'll give you interest for it, I will indeed; good interest, two per cent., paid every month if you like." His eagerness, his greed, his absorption in the subject of money, were wonderful to witness.

"What, my lad!" exclaimed Peter Lamb, his wonder, in pleasant conjunction with hearty good-humour, growing, "do you keep a bank as well?"

"The safest bank in London. Here's the card of it. The Mutual Self-Confidence Bank. Loans from five shillings upwards effected with working men and others. Repayable at moderate interest, by easy instalments. Yes, moderate interest. I charge very little; it's almost the ruin of me. You'll think over it, won't you?"

"Yes," said Peter Lamb, putting the card into his pocket, "I'll think over it."

"And now," continued Thrifty Miller, "as you are living in one of my houses and have plenty of money to spare, you ought to have your rooms better furnished. Not that they're not well enough furnished for ordinary people; too well, a great deal too well, for people who rob you right and left. But you're different; you're a man of means, and you like to be as comfortable as you can. You must have better furniture. I'll sell it to you; and if you don't care to pay for it all at once, you shall pay for it so much a week. I'm not hard on a man, far from it; I'm too soft and easy, a deal too soft and easy."

"What!" cried Peter Lamb, beginning to be bewildered, "furniture-broker as well!"

"Anything, anything for an honest penny. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll come up and see you, and you can show me your curiosities, and we'll talk over things. What do you say to that?"

"I'm agreeable, my lad."

"Don't buy anything till you see me. I'll provide you with everything you want, and you shall pay me at so much a week. And look here, if anybody comes and asks to see your curiosities, don't show them; if you do you'll be robbed, as I have been."

"Why, who *should* come to me, a stranger in London? I don't know a soul on the coast."

"Some one *might* come—some one might hear me say something, and try to be before me. There's my head clerk and secretary, Thomas Mayple; he wouldn't be backward in taking advantage of me; he never *is* backward in taking advantage of me. I'm obliged to keep him, because I shouldn't know what

to do without him, but I tremble when he is out of my sight. If you pay him money on my account, mind you take a receipt from him. Then I can see it if I want to, and he can't say you didn't pay him. Never give him a single sixpence without a receipt in my name. He tells me he hasn't a penny in the world, but I know better; he's been hoarding up and hoarding up ever since he has been with me, and he's so secret and close that I can't find out where he keeps his money. Thomas Mayple, remember. You must be very careful of him. Don't show him what you've got to sell, or he'll take you in."

"Thomas Mayple! That's the man I saw yesterday and paid my rent to."

"Yes, that's the man."

"A pleasant-looking man, with a bright eye and a cheery voice."

"There's the mischief. He puts it on to deceive you as he deceives me. Take my advice—don't believe in his bright eye and cheery voice. Now, as one who has been all round the world, do you think that if a man was a beggar, as he says he is, and was in debt to me, as I know he is, and wouldn't know what to do for a meal if I discharged him to-morrow and turned him into the streets, do you think that a man in such a position would go about with his bright eye and his cheery voice? do you think he *could* do it, with nothing less than starvation staring him in the face? It doesn't stand to reason. The plain meaning of it is, that he has got a secret hoard, and doesn't care for anybody or anything. That's partly why I keep him. I'll find out where he hides his money, and then I'll make him tell me how he has come by it. Now I've put you on your guard about him. Don't let him see your curiosities, and don't give him any money to take care of. You must put it in the Mutual Self-Confidence. I dare say I can manage two per cent. for you. I shall come and see you to-morrow. You can find your way to Windmill Street? It's past the London Hospital. Everybody knows where that is. And bear in mind what I've told you about Thomas Mayple. Don't trust him—don't trust him!"

CHAPTER XVI.

PETER LAMB OBTAINS A REPUTATION FOR ECCENTRICITY.

THRIFTY MILLER was as good as his word. At three o'clock the next afternoon he mounted the stairs of the house in Windmill Street in which Peter Lamb had taken lodgings. His appearance in the street, and in adjacent streets in which he owned house-property, was not hailed with satisfaction. He was not a popular landlord, but his power was so great that he was much feared. Therefore those who owed him money, and who were in a certain sense his vassals, held in abeyance the feelings they entertained for him. He was the custodian of many social seceries. Women were in debt to him unknown to their husbands; husbands were in debt to him unknown to their wives. He was an extensive tallyman, and he supplied the women with cheap finery, for which they paid weekly a few pence at a time. Deficiencies of payment, irregularities, postponements, were all visited by regulation fines, which swelled up his profits enormously. He lost by many of his customers, and could afford to lose; none the less did he moan and groan over every fresh bad debt. "Three shillings more lost. I shall die a ruined man! a ruined man!" That was his fear, that he would die a beggar, the fact being that he was the wealthiest tradesman in the neighbourhood, and could have afforded to live in a West-End mansion. But the expenses of such an establishment would have broken his heart.

The feelings he had expressed to Peter Lamb, with respect to Thomas Mayple, were genuine. Thomas Mayple was his right-hand man, and he would have wrung his hands in despair had he been deprived of his services. He held his faithful servant in his power as he had held him in his power when they both served Michael Featherstone in the years gone by. The paper obligations he had extracted from Thomas Mayple in the shape of "I promise to pay," and so many "months after date," totted up altogether to a stupendous amount. They had cost him less than nothing, so ingenious had he been in his trans-

actions with his quondam school-fellow. He reckoned them, nevertheless, as part of his wealth, and frequently directed Thomas Mayple's attention to them, asking him maliciously when he was going to settle up. "When my ship comes home," was Thomas Mayple's blithe reply. The careless, cheerful, beggared clerk never troubled himself about the debt. Had his friend and master (for Thrifty Miller was supposed to stand in both relations to him) drawn a bill for ten thousand pounds at three months' date, and offered him half a sovereign to sign it, he would have done so without hesitation. It must be confessed that his moral perceptive qualities with respect to these monetary matters between himself and Thrifty Miller were somewhat dulled. But there being in his mind a latent idea that he had received little or no money for the paper obligations, his conscience was not troubled respecting them.

He had fulfilled the promise of his youth. Unselfish, careless, self-sacrificing as a boy, he was the same as a man. His acts of kindness were many, and he was a general favourite. Strange that he should be a principal factotum of griping, grasping Thrifty Miller; but he carried out with gentleness, and in his own peculiar way, many a stern decree from creditor to debtor which would have failed had a harsher agent been employed. "You can't pay this morning," he would say to the embarrassed debtor; "but try, try! All I want is three shillings, and you won't be bothered for another week. You have only one shilling—that's all you've been able to scrape together! Well, suppose I lend you one; that will make two; and there will be one shilling to carry over, for which, according to the agreement, I must charge you a penny. There it is, down in the book: received two shillings, carried over thirteenpence, and twopence fine for last week makes fifteenpence; now isn't that the best way after all?" Thus he would make his rounds on collecting days, never keeping the slightest account of the shillings and pence he advanced from his own scanty purse to Thrifty Miller's poor debtors. In this manner the best part of his wages found its way back to his master's pocket. Lately, however, he had on occasions found himself disturbed by certain violations (which, upon consideration, perplexed him by their rough-and-ready justice) of regular rules, which he could not avoid when his purse was empty. One instance will sufficiently explain this new element of mental disturbance

He called upon a man for his weekly payment of one shilling and sixpence.

"Can't stump up this week," said the man; "call again next."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" was Thomas Mayple's gentle remonstrance; "it's against the rules. Try, now, try; it's only eighteenpence."

"That for the rules!" said the man, snapping his fingers. (I leave out the strong language; imagination will supply it.)

"I was a fool to agree to 'em."

"But you did agree, and you did sign the paper."

"I don't dispute it; makes me out a bigger fool than I thought I was."

"Can't you really manage it?"

"No, I can't; and I'm not sure I would if I could."

"Don't say that."

"I will say it; I mean it."

"I'd pay it for you if I could."

"I know you would, Mr. Mayple. You're a good sort: you've paid it before to-day. But why should you?"

"I don't exactly know why," said Thomas Mayple, with a kindly smile, "but I would."

"Perhaps," said the debtor, plunging into the argumentative stage, "you think I haven't got reason on my side."

Thomas Mayple exhibited signs of uneasiness, and answered vaguely, "I don't look on it in that light."

"Ah," said the debtor, "but I'm bound to, and I'm going to. Now, Mr. Mayple, you're a sensible man."

"Thank you," said Thomas Mayple feebly.

"And a man of figures."

"Thank you."

"Cast your eyes over this little account book. What did I buy of Thrifty Miller?"

"An American clock, twelve and six; a table-cover, fifteen shillings; a polished round table, for the corner of the room, one pound."

"I bought 'em to please my wife, and I must have had more money than sense at the time. Thrifty Miller put it into her head that she couldn't very well live without the things. We'd lived without 'em a matter of ten years, but we couldn't live without 'em any longer, according to Thrifty Miller. I

pointed out to my wife that we didn't want an American clock ; we had a very good kitchen clock that kept capital time. 'A corner table, now,' I said to her, 'what's the use of it?' But she wouldn't listen to reason ; Thrifty Miller had regularly talked her over. I was in full work then, and she teased me so, that for the sake of peace I told Thrifty Miller to send the things home. What's the total ?"

"Two seven six."

"To be paid for at the rate of eighteenpence a week. Regulations for fines in case of arrears, and for accumulative fines in case of non-payment of previous fines. Power to take possession of the goods any week the one-and-six wasn't paid, to sell 'em at debtor's risk, and sue for balance due. I never read the blessed agreement when I signed it, but I know it by heart now ; and what I say is, that Shylock was a fool to Thrifty Miller. The goods were bought two years ago and odd, and the weekly payments have not been regular ; I admit it. Sometimes it was my fault ; sometimes it was my wife's, who spent the money on other things, wheedling the collector—principally you, Mr. Mayple—and getting fined for her pains ; sometimes it was the fault of my having no work to do. So it has gone on. Now those goods were bought two years ago and odd. Reckon up how much I've paid for 'em."

Thomas Mayple did so, and said, "Six pounds eight."

"Nearly three times the original debt. And how much does the book make me indebted to Thrifty Miller ?"

Thomas Mayple consulted the book again. "One pound four."

"Which means," said the man, who was fast working himself up into a heat, "that into Thrifty Miller's unrighteous pocket have gone five pounds four and sixpence of my hard earnings. I'll tell you what became of the goods. American clock went for two weeks ; wound up, never would go again. Table cover, first time it was washed (warranted too, mind !) every bit of colour came out, and it was no better than a rag. Little round table fell all to pieces in less than a fortnight ; it wouldn't stand by itself in the middle of the room, you know : wanted a wall to support it, and the wall it was put against happened to be near the fire. Result, melting of bad glue and a general smash. My wife and I have had more rows about the rubbish Thrifty Miller forced upon us than everything else put together. And

now that my blood's up, Mr. Mayple, I'll give you my ultipomatum, as the old buttermilk says in the play. I've paid for the goods over and over again, and I'll not pay another farthing—not another farthing! Tell Thrifty Miller to put that in his pipe and smoke it."

"But there's the agreement," remonstrated Thomas Mayple.

"Let Thrifty Miller act up to its letter. He can take possession of his rubbish—it's up in a corner of the wash-house—sell it, and sue me for the balance. I'll produce my book of payments in court, and I'll see if I can't get some smart cheap lawyer to show him up. I'm not blaming you, Mr. Mayple, but I mean to stick to what I've said."

And he did. He would not pay another shilling, and he defied Thrifty Miller to summon him. No summons, however, was taken out against him, the reference to "some smart cheap lawyer" being seemingly unpalatable to Thrifty Miller. He met his debtor on his way to Peter Lamb's lodgings, and received a scowl from him, of which he took no notice, his mind being at the time very much occupied by visions of bargains in the shape of curiosities from foreign lands. Peter Lamb's rooms were on the top floor of the house, and when Thrifty Miller reached the landing he paused a moment before knocking. This proceeding was not necessitated by loss of breath in climbing the stairs; it was simply a prudent habit of his, tending to mental composure. He was never known to do anything in a hurry; first thoughts he had, fiery first thoughts on occasions, as in the case of the man who owed him money and defied him, but he always found second thoughts best. Therefore it was that he paused on the landing outside Peter Lamb's door.

Had any person accused him of eavesdropping it would not have angered him. Detection in suchlike peccadilloes, and even of larger offences, conveyed to his moral sense no reproach. He was vulnerable only in two points—his skin and his purse. His skin for choice, for that was his body; his money was his soul: an unknown quantity. Undoubtedly he listened for purposes of enlightenment, and his labour was not entirely thrown away, though it bore no fruit. Sounds came to his ears, sounds of voices, but he could not make head or tail of them. This caused him to listen all the more intently, and an expression of annoyance appeared on his face. "He's talking to

somebody," thought Thrifty Miller, "but what on earth is he saying?" To solve the puzzle he knocked at the door, and, receiving no reply, took French leave, and turned the handle. The moment he put foot in the room he would gladly have withdrawn it, for the place was in utter darkness; but Peter Lamb was too quick for him. The sailor darted forward, seized him by the collar, and dragged him into the room, crying—

"Now, my lad, show your colours. No privateering!"

It was well enough to say "Show your colours," but not so easy to do in the prevailing gloom. Thrifty Miller stammered, "I met you yesterday, and promised to come and see you. Don't you remember? I'm your landlord."

Peter Lamb broke out into a hearty laugh. "Remember, my lad? Of course I remember. Come to see my curios, eh? Well, I don't know that I've anything to sell. But let's put a light on the subject."

Before he could carry out his intention an unearthly yell from Thrifty Miller sent him into a fit of laughter that almost choked him. In the dark as he was, he knew what had occurred. Thrifty Miller, standing in the middle of the room, without being able to see an inch before his nose, suddenly felt some dreadful creature seize his leg. His screams did not frighten the fearful thing, which crept up his body, and perched itself on his shoulder. He shook with fear at the thought that he had been inveigled into the sailor's rooms for the purpose of being murdered, and his frenzied appeals for mercy and forgiveness served only to increase Peter Lamb's merriment. When both the men were pretty well exhausted, Peter Lamb pulled the blind from the window, and whistled to the creature perching on Thrifty Miller's shoulder. It was a monkey, and at its master's whistle it leapt from Thrifty Miller's shoulder, and jumped on to a rope hanging from the ceiling, where it swang to and fro in great contentment, grinning and chattering.

"It won't hurt you, my lad," said Peter Lamb, wiping the tears from his eyes; he had laughed so heartily that he cried; "there ain't a bit of vice in Barbary. When you came in I was teaching him tricks in the dark. Sit down, sit down, and recover yourself."

He forced Thrifty Miller into a chair, and made him swallow a mouthful of rum from a stone bottle, so strong that he was nearly strangled.

"You feel better, don't you?" asked Peter Lamb, when Thrifty Miller's paroxysm of coughing was over. "Prime stuff that, straight from Jamaica. Don't be too curious about the duty; least said, soonest mended." This with a wink at his landlord, which was intended to convey a world of humorous meaning. But Thrifty Miller had no sense of humour; he had half an idea that he had been poisoned, and in the midst of his terror he derived a grotesque consolation from the fact that it had not cost him anything. He gave trembling utterance to his fear that the sailor had helped him out of the wrong bottle.

"Not a bit of it," said Peter Lamb, with a broad grin, "it's the only liquor I've got aboard. Don't be frightened, my lad, you'll be another man in a minute or two."

Which was exactly what Thrifty Miller did not wish to be. Prudence, however, whispered to him that it would be wise to make the best of the situation, and feeling presently really warmer and more comfortable, he found courage to enter into conversation with his new tenant.

"I couldn't make out who you were talking to," he said, "nor what it was you were saying to that—that"—he was almost saying "gentleman," to propitiate the monkey, but substituted "creature" instead; with a deferential movement towards the animal, as much as to say, "Pray excuse me for calling you a creature."

"I was talking double Dutch to him," said Peter Lamb, with a broad grin; "it's the only language he understands. As for his being a monkey, if it wasn't for his self-conceit he might just as well have been born a lamb, for all the mischief there's in him. Talking of curios, now, he's a rare one. Would you like to buy him?"

"No, thank you," said Thrifty Miller hastily.

"That's lucky, for I wouldn't part with him for his weight in gold. He's the only friend I've got in the world, the only relative, so to speak, the only comrade I've got to stand by me. See the sense of him. Thinks I'm a bit melancholy, and rubs his face against my hand for consolation. No, old fellow, I'll not sell you."

Thrifty Miller by this time was almost himself again, and his busy brain was cunningly at work.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, following the monkey's

lead, with a note of false sympathy in his voice, "that you haven't a friend or a relative in the world?"

"It's true, mate."

"Not one? Not a brother, or a sister, or a cousin?"

"Not one."

"Why," thought Thrifty Miller, "if anything was to happen to him here—he's not a young man, and life is very uncertain—I should have to bury him, and his property would belong to me. I mustn't lose sight of him. *I'll* look after him! *I'll* be his friend!"

Thus was he already weighing his chances with respect to his tenant. Quick at cunning device, he had but small need to cudgel his brains for tricks of commerce. They came to him intuitively. Birds in the bush were good, birds in the hand were better. It made no difference to him that the bird in this case was a monkey.

"What did you say his name was?" he asked.

"Barbery," replied Peter Lamb.

The monkey looked up; he knew the sound of his name.

"I like to be sure," said Thrifty Miller, "that my agents carry out my rules. Did you take the rooms as a single or a married man? Mr. Mayple was bound to ask you that."

"He did ask me. I took the rooms as a single man."

"But the monkey, now," said Thrifty Miller, in a wheedling tone, "nothing was said about it; not mentioned in the agreement, eh?"

"No need to, my lad."

"I don't know—I don't know. It is so very unusual—almost a risk. Should count at least for as much as a wife."

"Steer straight, my lad, don't tack about without cause. What are you driving at?"

"Let to a married couple, the rent of these rooms would be a shilling a-week more than you pay for them as a single man. Pardon my mentioning it, but property is in a bad state; times are very hard, very hard!"

"So," said Peter Lamb, his honest face beaming, "for Barbery you want me to pay another shilling a week. Do you hear that, Barbery? You're treated as a human—and you're as good as one. Say no more, my lad. I sha'n't object to an extra shilling, and to something more on the top of that—for I see

head is running on money—if you agree to what I've been

thinking of this morning. If you don't agree, I must go elsewhere to live, that's all."

"You sha'n't go, my good friend," said Thrifty Miller in alarm; "you shall not leave these comfortable rooms; I should never forgive myself—never! What is it you've been thinking of this morning? Of course I'll agree to it; *you* wouldn't purpose anything unfair; you're too honest and generous. What is it?"

"All in good time. You want to look at my curios, don't you? You're welcome to look, though I'm not inclined to sell. What do you think of these shells? Here's one with a rare pearl in it. Here's some fine coral, white and red; ivory curios from Japan and China. You see, my lad, after I'd worked a spell on the goldfields and met with a piece of rare good luck—"

"You did, eh?" cried Thrifty Miller eagerly. "You worked on the gold-fields, and were lucky! Did you find much gold, eh?—did you find a great, great deal?"

"I came upon what is called a pocket," said Peter Lamb, "and in three weeks I took out nine hundred ounces."

Thrifty miller raised his hands in wonder and admiration.

"Nine hun-dred oun-ces!" he exclaimed; "nine hun-dred oun-ces!"

"No less; rather over than under, my lad."

"A fortune, a fortune! What did you do with it?"

"Sold the gold, and took care of the money."

"How much now, how much have you taken care of?"

"Enough to keep me all my days, and that should be enough for any man. As I was saying, my lad, after I'd worked a spell on the gold-fields, and met with good luck, I didn't say home-ward bound at once; I thought I'd go about a bit, and see for the last time countries I'd been familiar with when I worked before the mast. That's how I picked up my curios, a bit here and a bit there, with a kind of idea"—here Peter Lamb broke off suddenly with, "But that's not worth mentioning."

"Yes it is, yes it is," said Thrifty Miller, in fawning admiration, fearful lest something he might be able to turn to his advantage should be withheld from his knowledge; "mention it, by all means."

"Well," said Peter Lamb, with a bashfulness that did not sit ill on him, "with a kind of idea that I might by some chance meet with a lass who might be agreeable to accept them. That's a good reason, isn't it, my lad, for not wanting to sell them?"

And now, if you're willing, we'll say a word about that matter I've been thinking of. I've taken these rooms, and I'm agreeable to keep 'em ; and I'm likewise agreeable to pay the extra shilling for Barbery—on one condition, my lad."

"What is it, my good friend?"

"That you let me the roof as well."

"The roof!" echoed Thrifty Miller, in astonishment. "What do you want of the roof?"

"That's my business ; *your* business is to let it, and to take the money for it."

"To be sure, to be sure," said Thrifty Miller, to whom this singular proposition opened up a new field of possible profit.

"Barbery and me have been taking the bearings of it through the trap-door in the ceiling here, and we've settled that it'll suit us. Barbery has a rare wise head on him, ugly as he is. What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

"How long will you take it for?" inquired Thrifty Miller, now completely in his element, and speaking as though the letting of roofs had been the chief business of his life. "I couldn't think of letting it for less than six months certain."

"I'll take it for six months certain. What's the rent?"

"Will five shillings a-week suit you?"

"I'll take it for that, and the thing's done."

"There's the agreement to be signed."

"Write it out, my lad ; I'll sign it."

"And a deposit to be paid on the spot. Don't think me hard, but rules are rules, you know."

"Fair enough. Here's a sovereign, and the roof's mine. What do you say, now, to a drop more rum?"

"Not a drop, thank you, not a drop," said Thrifty Miller, taking his departure.

He suffered tortures because he had asked so low a sum as five shillings a-week for the roof.

"He'd have given me eight," he groaned ; "he'd have given me ten. What is he going to do with it? A fine thing if I could let all my roofs ; it would double the value of my property. I got another shilling out of him for his monkey ! That was a good stroke, a very good stroke !"

In the contemplation of this clever manœuvre his spirits revived.

In the course of the week the neighbourhood was much

agitated and interested by the appearance of a huge mast, over thirty feet in height, which was hoisted on to the roof of the house in which Peter Lamb lodged. It was a work of great labour, and strong pulleys had to be employed in its execution. Peter Lamb superintended the operation, and found means to quiet some grumblers who had rooms in the house, and who, without a bribe, might have objected to the carrying out of the design. When the mast lay upon the roof, securely fastened by ropes, so that it could not roll off, the neighbours asked each other, What next?

It was gradually made apparent to them. The mast was raised, and so firmly fixed as to defy the strongest wind. It reared itself twenty feet above the surrounding chimneys, and four or five feet below its summit cross-trees were affixed, and ropes, and a canvas sail furled close to the yard, which might have been a main-royal, or a main sky-sail. Upon this point the only authority was Peter Lamb, and he was not asked. The neighbours were content to watch, and wonder, and formulate their own ideas.

It was not, as we know, because Peter Lamb was deficient in geniality that closer ties were not formed between him and his neighbours; like certain chemicals, they would not "mix," their natures being so diverse. His proceedings, exciting so much interest, attracted, of course, absorbed attention, and the general opinion was that he was eccentric; some went even farther, and said that the old sailor must be out of his mind.

At the end of three weeks Peter Lamb's idea had assumed its practical and completed shape, and the workmen had taken their leave. The next wonder was to what use he intended to put this familiar feature of his seafaring life. This wonder, also, was soon solved.

On the very first night, Peter Lamb was observed by the persons watching in the streets below to slowly climb the mast he had erected; after him climbed the monkey, Barbary. Having reached the cross-tree to which the main-royal or the main sky-sail was furled, he squatted himself comfortably thereon, and Barbary squatted by his side. Then he pulled out a pipe, filled it, and lighted it; and there he sat till late in the night, smoking and ruminating, and contemplating the city with its dull glare of lights which lay beneath him.

This recreation became a habit with him, and scarcely a night

passed that he was not to be seen upon his perch (which, under certain atmospheric conditions, appeared to touch the sky and to be of illimitable height), smoking his pipe, with the monkey gravely watching him. Clear moon or no moon, black sky or starlighted, wind fair or foul, there sat Peter Lamb, puffing and ruminating. Boys and girls used to congregate in the world to which he did not seem to belong, and wait for him to appear on the roof.

"There he goes, there he goes! and there's his monkey. My! can't he climb, with his wooden leg! *You* couldn't do it, Billy, without a wooden leg! Now he's pulling out his pipe; now he's filling it; now he's lighting it; now he's puffing at it! I can see the smoke. I wonder if his monkey can talk, and what language it speaks? Monkey language, of course. They'll fall down one night, the pair of 'em, and be smashed to bits!"

These remarks, in appropriate vernacular, were made by one and another, while the old sailor looked down upon the pigmies and upon the myriad roofs which covered rich and poor, and said to the monkey gazing sagely into his face:

"A lonely world, Barbery! a damned lonely world!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WINTER.

RETURN we to the home of the Earnshaws.

It is winter. In the waning autumn leading articles and learned letters had appeared in the newspapers, based upon early flights of migratory birds from the shores of England. A cold and bitter winter was predicted from these and other signs. The prophets were right. It is indeed a cold and bitter winter. Early in November the snow began to fall, and continued at intervals right up to the third week in December. We are within a week of Christmas, and nipping winds are blowing through scanty clothing, chilling the hearts of the very poor, to whom the lovely snow, lovely in its gracefulness and purity, is the cruellest enemy. White and beautiful in the eyes of St. James; black and biting in the eyes of St. Giles. Happily, there are good Samaritans about; though, the need is so strong, there should be twenty for every one. Philip Raven is at work heart and soul; his book is not yet ready; pictures crowd upon him; pressing duties, which he would consider it a crime to avoid, crowd upon him. Were he not stout-hearted he would wring his hands in despair. Not less merciful and compassionate is Richard Freeman, who is now his friend. But Freeman long since has passed through experiences which are new to Philip, and his nature is sterner. His deeds are as beautiful, but in the performance of them he appears to have a certain scorn of himself. Praise him for a kindly act, and he would look coldly at you. The cunningest (using the word in its best sense) reader of human nature would be perplexed in the study of this strange man, pronounced by Philip Raven to be a priest. Perhaps it is as well that hidden depths in his nature are not revealed, for, despite the sweet humanity which beautifies his life, there is a lurking fire smouldering within him, which in special circumstances might prove dangerous, and which, if it ever broke out, might render him an enemy to society and society's laws.

Since the day on which she had received Dr. Howard's letter at the hospital, Mary Earnshaw had not seen the good physician. With her answer to the letter and with her return of the cheque he had enclosed, she was perfectly satisfied; she thought no more of that. But she read Dr. Howard's letter many times to impress upon herself the duty it conveyed to her sense of right not to take up time which he could so much more usefully employ in the service of other sufferers. It was hard, but it was just; she inwardly blessed him for all his kindness to her, and she waited for her doom. It came, slowly and deceitfully, and by gradations so fine that she frequently beguiled herself into the hope that she would be spared the cruel blow. Indeed, her hours mercifully were so filled with pressing obligations that, even if she had had the heart, she had but little time for repining. Philippa was a great help to her with her lacework, but the young girl was slow at it, and took six hours to do what her mother usually did in one. So carefully nurtured and tended, so carefully kept from the knowledge of the anxieties and the necessities of their every-day life, had Philippa been, that recognition of their actual condition was almost impossible. In this respect Mary may have been unwise, but who shall blame her? Not I, nor you, I hope. A love so full-hearted, a life so sacrificing, cannot be condemned, cannot even meet with censure. And if I take the course of defending her from possible reproach, my doing so springs only from the consciousness that there are in the world persons so thoroughly cold and practical that they can see no merit in any act which does not strike at the bitter root of harsh necessity. Hitherto Mary had been able to provide for her children and her lost husband's father. She had courage, she had faith; she did not sit down and mourn, but worked for those she loved to the uttermost extent of her power. What more could she do? Raise up terrible phantoms in the dim future to poison the present hours—strip her life and the lives of those dear to her of all sweetness by holding before their eyes an image of despair which would blight the flowers of youth, of home, of love? No. She did for the best. When love is allied with untiring industry, with sacred unselfishness, with innocence and purity, with prayer, and trust in God, it is to me so holy that it can do no wrong.

So winter crept upon her and hers. Raymond could get no

work ; and indeed, with winter's advent, had he obtained employment he could not have accepted it. Upon this young man stole a sickness which is not uncommon to the tenderly reared of his age. He grew weak and thin ; his movements were languid, like the movements of an old man ; the sap of approaching manhood required what did not come within his reach—more nourishing food, the juices of which would strengthen the fibres of his body, warmer clothing, purer air—all these were required and were denied to him. Mary knew, and suffered the more, and denied herself that she might give to him ; but it was of no avail.

Old Mr. Earnshaw still went out into the western thoroughfares with his penny toys, but his trade also languished, for the reason that Mary was compelled to cut down her purchases of cheap materials from which he made his merchandise. The little box in which his small store of money had for years been kept was now nearly always empty, and sometimes Mary looked forward with painful eagerness to his return from his day's wanderings, so that she might take from the box the few pence he put into it, in order to buy bread for her family. And still she never quite lost hope ; still she looked forward to the gleam of sunshine which presently was to break through the dark clouds which encompassed her.

Perhaps as poignant a pang as any she experienced in connection with her circumstances arose from an incident in which her dear ones were in nowise concerned. Notwithstanding her struggles and difficulties she had always, until lately, managed to spare one penny in the course of the week to bestow upon some person poorer than herself and in more immediate need. She had been in the habit for years of going out of her way on Saturday nights for the purpose of slipping this penny into the hands of a pale-faced woman—a mother, also, like herself—who stood begging in the people's market in the neighbourhood. She knew that this woman was in terrible want, and that nothing but dire necessity compelled her to beg thus openly. Some weeks before Dr. Howard had informed her that her case was hopeless she found this woman's place empty in the market, and upon inquiry learnt that she was dead. Her penny, however, was not, because of this end to a weary life, to be diverted from its charitable purpose, and she bestowed it upon a ragged little waif, not more than four years of age, in whose pinched,

wan face hunger most sadly asserted itself. After a time this forlorn child was in the habit of looking for her on Saturday nights, and becoming her regular pensioner in the place of the one that was dead, received the dole, which quickly took the shape of plum-duff or peas-pudding from the cheapest cook-shop in all those thoroughfares. To the child-starveling Mary was indeed a ministering angel; for one night at least in the week he had something warm in his stomach. But when the hard winter set in, and the pinch of saddest, bitterest poverty made itself felt in Mary's home—when every penny, nay, every farthing had to be reckoned with—with Raymond's uncomplaining face wringing her very heart in its mute, unconseious appeal—she had to withhold the penny from the little one waiting for her in the ice-bound streets. Impossible to describe her suffering as she thought of the little fellow during the first night on which she could not provide him with his humble supper. All through the night, in the dark as she lay abed, his ragged little figure was appealing to her. She had avoided the spot on which they usually met, and for many following weeks avoided it, in fear lest she should meet him. He sought her, however, and one night, when with her last threepence she had bought a half-quartern loaf and was hastening along with it to her hungry ones at home, she felt a tug at her dress. It was her baby pensioner. He said nothing; he simply looked at her with hungry reproach in his eyes. She looked down upon him in affright, and her limbs trembled so that she could scarcely stand upright. It seemed to her in that moment as though she was about to commit a great crime. A sound escaped her lips which might have been a stifled cry of horror, or an agonized sob of helpless compassion; her children's faces rose before her, and she tore herself away from the little ragged fellow, and flew to her home, where those dependent upon her were waiting for bread. This incident remained long in her mind, and occasioned her deep suffering.

It was within a week of Christmas. From early morning Mary had been at work, endeavouring to finish a piece of lace for which she was to be paid on the following day. Her eyes ached terribly, and frequently during the day all visible objects had faded from her sight for a few moments at a time. While she was in this state of darkness she continued her work mechanically, spoiling the pattern without being aware of it;

her sight on each of these visitations had gradually returned to her, and she said nothing to her children of her distress of mind. At eight o'clock in the night, Philippa said :

"Mother, you must be tired. Put aside your work, and let us walk out a little. It will do you good."

"This work *must* be finished by to-morrow, dear," said Mary.

"Yes, I know," said the girl ; "I will sit up with you to-night, if you like, and then it will be sure to be done."

"No, Philippa, no," said Mary hurriedly ; "I can manage it alone, I dare say." She set aside her work. "Get me my hat, dear, a walk *will* freshen me up ; though you must not think I am very tired. You want to see the shops, Philippa ?"

"Yes, mother."

"Come, then, we will just run out for half an hour."

She would not have complied so readily had she not feared that by overtaxing her eyes she would be doing more harm than good. To rest them a little would benefit them. So she and Philippa went out into the streets.

The shops were gay with lights and Christmas temptations, and Philippa gazed on the bright things with something of longing in her heart. The mother's heart was faint and cold, for the deadly film was over her eyes again, and all was blank before her.

"This is a beautiful window, mother."

"Yes, dear."

Christmas cards, toys, rolls of ribbon, handkerchiefs, pretty devices, artificial flowers, all tastefully arranged. It was one of those miscellaneous shops with which busy London neighbourhoods abound, and which seem to deal in everything a young girl would like to buy. Philippa was full of admiration, praising this and that, and speaking with quite natural excitement.

"One day, when we are rich," she said, "you and I, mother, will come out and buy ever so many things. We *shall* be rich one day ; grandfather is certain of it."

"Grandfather is always very hopeful, dear."

"So are you, mother, are you not ?"

"Yes, dear. It will be a beautiful day for us when grandfather's words come true."

"Which of those two hats do you like best, mother—the one trimmed with daisies or the one trimmed with forget-me-nots ?"

"Which do *you* like best, dear child ?"

"I like them both, but I think the daisies are the prettiest."

"I think so too, dear," said Mary, unable to repress a slight shiver.

"Are you cold, mother?"

"No, dear, not at all."

"Now we will walk along a little more briskly. Of course you say you are not cold, just because it delights me to look at the windows. I am cold, too. Come along, mother—come along."

"Philippa," said Mary very sweetly, and in a low tone, "the air already has done me good."

"I knew it would."

"But my eyes *do* feel tired a little."

"Poor mother!" murmured Philippa, stroking Mary's hand.

"And I think," continued Mary cheerfully, "if I were to shut them, and you would lead me along, and describe everything you see, that by the time we get home they would be as strong as ever."

"Yes, mother, yes," said Philippa merrily, linking her arm close in her mother's, "of course I will. You shall see everything through my eyes. I will lead you very carefully, and you must promise me to pretend that you are blind all the way home."

"I promise, my dear; but you must not pass anything you would like to look at."

So the daughter led the mother through the busy streets, threading her way with many a merry word, pausing frequently, and describing the shops and the windows, and all the bright goods displayed therein. They stopped before a space occupied by a vendor of holly and misletoe and Christmas-trees.

"There are not so many berries on the holly this year as last, mother."

"No, my dear?"

"Not near so many; but the misletoe is full of berry."

They remained out for an hour, and when they reached their street-door Philippa said:

"Now we are home, and you can open your eyes."

Mary did so in fear, and, to her great joy, could dimly see her daughter's face.

"Kiss me, darling," she said; "we have had a happy walk."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH.

“MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

“Let me first thank you for your invitation to spend Christmas with you in the country. Under ordinary circumstances nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I have so many duties pressing upon me that I cannot possibly leave my present field of labour. I am sure you will excuse and will not blame me. Gratitude for all you have done for me might make it appear incumbent upon me to obey your slightest wish, but I have no fear that you will be annoyed at my determination to spend Christmas among my poor. It would distress me to be away from them; I should not be able to drive them from my thoughts, and you would therefore find me the dullest of companions. All happiness attend you; all good be yours. I shall think of you during the holiday season, and you, who have been to me the truest friend man ever had, will be first and foremost in my Christmas garland of cherished memories. I have sufficient cause to think of you, without reference to the more remote past, and hundreds of poor people will have sufficient cause to bless you. The cheque for one hundred pounds enclosed in the letter I received from you yesterday, to be spent as Richard Freeman and I deem best in the service of the poor, gave me a pleasure I can scarcely express. As I drew it from the envelope I seemed to hear a chorus of thankful voices from women and children. It is they who are the most demonstrative; men's needs are hardly less great, but when relief is given men are quieter than women and children; and that some are sullen and some shame-faced does not appear to me quite unnatural.

“It is an agreeable pleasure to me that, in the disposal of this Christmas gift, you have associated Richard Freeman's name with mine. You could hardly fail to be interested in him after the many descriptions I have given of the noble sacrifices made by this working-man for his fellow-workers; but I must not lay

myself open to the charge of laying bare only one side of his character, and I therefore proceed to the narration of an incident which I think you should be made acquainted with. You have thrown out hints in one or two of your letters of a probable meeting between you and my friend Freeman, and I wish you to know all that I know of him, and to see not only that part of him which you cannot help admiring, but also something of him which you may feel disposed to censure.

“You remember the name of Jane Wraxhall, of whom I spoke in a letter some months ago. If the sad details of her death and burial have escaped your memory, I should wish you, before proceeding farther, to read that letter again, so that you may the more correctly understand the incident I am about to describe. (You see, my dear sir, that I bear in mind what you told me about my letters—that you did not destroy them, but kept them for possible future reference and use.) Yesterday evening Richard Freeman and I were walking home to my room in company, and it happened that he was talking of this Jane Wraxhall. If I have failed in imparting to you a true sense of the ‘thoroughness’ of Freeman’s nature, I have failed altogether in my delineation of his character. He is ‘thorough’ in everything he undertakes; he has something of the sleuth-hound in him, and it is his bent to track most things to their source. Thus, when poor Jane Wraxhall was buried in the grave in which her baby lay, he made it his business to trace the course of her career from the time of her arrival in London down to her death. I had no suspicion of this; he made no mention of it; and I supposed him to be too busy upon other matters to be able to spare time for a story, however sad, whose last page seemed to me to be written. I was mistaken. Yesterday in our walk he told me that he was acquainted with all the particulars of her history.

“‘I will not shock you with it,’ he said; ‘but there are men walking the streets under the shelter of the law who are as guilty as the worst murderer that ever took innocent life.’

“He spoke these words as we stood at the door of a house I had occasion to enter. He said he would wait for me, and I left him in the street. I remained in the house about ten minutes, and when I returned to the street I looked for Richard Freeman. He was not in sight; but at a short distance from the house I observed an excited crowd in the roadway,

and heard voices, one of which was unmistakably that of Freeman. I pushed through the crowd, and saw Freeman occupying a clear space in the centre, holding in his grasp a man well-known and thoroughly feared in all the surrounding neighbourhood. This man's name is Thrifty Miller; he is a money-lender and usurer, a landlord, a tallyman—one of a class of men whose business is conducted upon principles which bring misery and despair upon all who have dealings with them.

“‘Don't crowd upon me,’ cried Freeman to the people; ‘I have an account to settle with this man.’

“They obeyed him readily enough, even with eagerness. From the faces of many I judged that any account which Freeman had to settle with this Thrifty Miller which would bring punishment upon the usurer was likely to be a great satisfaction to them. Freeman was quivering with indignation; Thrifty Miller was white with fear, and begging for mercy.

“‘Mercy, you cur!’ cried Freeman, ‘what mercy do you show to others? Fair dealing you shall have; no, not fair dealing, for that would leave you dead on the ground; but I promise you a taste of it. By the Mosaic law you owe two lives, and you have only one to pay them with.’

“By some means he had obtained possession of a horsewhip, which he held, doubled up, in his hand. I suspect that a carter had lent it to him, for such a man, whose horse and cart were standing in the road, was looking composedly on. As Freeman raised the whip, and as Thrifty Miller cowered in dread of the coming blow, I thought it right to interfere.

“‘What are you about?’ I asked, in a tone so low that it could only reach his ears. ‘You are beside yourself with passion. If the man has done wrong let the law punish him.’

“‘The law protects him,’ replied Freeman sternly; ‘it does not reach the monster. Let me alone. I honour you, but I am under the influence of a dangerous mood. I am responsible for my act, and I am prepared to justify it in the face of the world.’

“I saw that further remonstrance on my part would aggravate the mischief, and I deemed it best to hold my tongue. The people gathered round had watched my interference with disfavour, and as I stood aside I heard a murmur of satisfaction from them. Freeman raised the whip again.

“ ‘This,’ he said, ‘for Jane Wraxhall lying in her grave, to which you drove her!’ The whip descended; the lash which Freeman administered was a merciless one, and the usurer shrieked as he felt it.

“ ‘This,’ continued Freeman, ‘for the baby lying by Jane Wraxhall’s side!’

“ Again the whip was raised and descended; another merciless lash was administered, and the usurer shrieked the louder. Then Freeman released him, and he fell upon the ground.

“ ‘You know my name,’ he said to the prostrate man, ‘and where I live. My wish is that you should bring me before a magistrate for the assault. If by any means I could compel you to do so, I would adopt them. Thank you, men and women’—this to the crowd—‘for allowing justice to take its course. If any of you have daughters, keep them from this craven here.’

“ Their countenances bespoke their admiration. They made room for him and me, and we passed through them arm-in-arm.

“ It astonished me to find that Freeman had suddenly grown quite calm; there was no trace of passion remaining in him.

“ ‘My dangerous mood is over,’ he said. ‘I could no more help doing what I have done than I can prevent the visitation of death when my time arrives. Now you know the story of Jane Wraxhall. I will relieve your mind upon one point. This is the end of the affair; the villain will not have the courage to carry it to its natural end. But that did not influence me. Let us talk of something pleasanter.’

“ I make no comment on this incident; I leave you to judge for yourself.

“ He accompanied me home, and there your letter and your cheque awaited me. The effect it had upon me was one of unmitigated gratitude and thankfulness. I gave audible expression to my feelings. Freeman said very little; he was much graver and steadier than I. One remark he made which I shall chronicle.

“ ‘I pity the rich,’ he said, ‘but when such an experience as this comes across me I envy them.’

“ He desired me to thank you for your confidence and trust in him; you may be sure it will not be abused.

“We have been busy mapping out schemes as to the best method of expending your hundred pounds, so as to do the greatest amount of good, and we have almost decided upon a plan. It is this.

“One-fourth the sum to be distributed among persons who would rather starve than beg. There are such. Within fifty yards of the house in which I live two sisters died of starvation four days ago. They had been starving for months, and were too proud (I use the accepted term) to beg. So carefully had they concealed their condition from the knowledge of the neighbours that no suspicion of their sufferings existed. These women had not touched wine, or beer, or spirits for years; therefore no charge of intemperance could be laid at their door. They worked for a cheap tailor, and their united earnings when they were in health averaged seven shillings a week. One, falling sick, had strength no longer to ply her needle; so she lay down to die. The other, overtaking herself, likewise fell sick, and *she* lay down to die by the side of her sister. They were found at the point of death, and the efforts made to save them were unavailing. The evidence at the inquest as to the cause of death was conclusive. Freeman tells me that there are many such cases of slow starvation and terrible need in the neighbourhood, and he undertakes that there shall be a practical pennyworth of good done for every penny expended of the twenty-five pounds set apart for these special cases. The remaining seventy-five pounds will be thus expended. A large hall can be secured, in which we shall place benches and tables to accommodate nearly two hundred persons. Plates, knives and forks, and spoons can be hired, the hirer taking all risks, for a very moderate sum. In the rear of the hall is a capacious kitchen, in which, with proper system, the cooking of food for several hundreds of persons can be efficiently done. The cooks and waiters will be volunteers, who receive no pay. Freeman has already the names of sixteen volunteers on his list, every one of whom he personally knows. At three o'clock on Christmas Day the door of the hall will be opened, and a smoking-hot dinner of meat, vegetables, bread, and pudding will be served to all who like to apply for it. No questions will be asked. Half an hour will be allowed to each diner, whose place, upon retirement, will be filled by the next applicant. Care will be taken, as far

as practicable, that the weakest shall not be crowded out ; children will be especially looked after. Freeman says, after all expenses are paid unconnected with the actual purchase of food, that he will be able to supply at least fifteen hundred substantial dinners, and perhaps two thousand. What he has set his heart upon is that the applicants shall have a hearty, wholesome meal. 'You shall see a sight in Christian England,' he said to me, 'that you shall not forget till your dying day.'

"Into the hard and fast wisdom of this plan I do not propose to go ; its practical humanity is sufficient for me, and I have almost pledged myself to it. I am quite aware that it is open to objection, and that persons who look upon charity with mathematical eyes will find much to say against it, especially against that branch of it which insists that no questions shall be asked. I shall not argue or quarrel with them ; they go their way, we go ours ; and for any good they do I, as a brother-worker whose views are not in accordance with theirs, am grateful.

"You ask me what kind of personal standing I have among those in whose midst I am living. I reply, one that satisfies me. At first I was regarded with suspicion by some, who, because I did not drink with them, and was not a costermonger, or a navvy, or a chimney-sweep, or (maybe) a thief, regarded me as inimical to them. Much of that feeling has worn away, and even men who are but too familiar with prison walls occasionally return my greeting. I think the circumstance of my being a cripple, and of my being unable to walk without the aid of a crutch-stick, has been of use to me ; that I labour under some kind of misfortune is a link between us.

"A joyful Christmas to you, dear sir, and many, many years of happiness.

"Believe me to be, faithfully yours,

"PHILIP RAVEN."

CHAPTER XIX.

A DESERTION AND A MEETING.

PETER LAMB'S impression that London was a lonely world grew stronger as time rolled by. When a man elevates himself so far above his fellows as he did by sitting on the top of a mast thirty feet above the chimney-pots of his neighbours' houses, he may be said by his own act to cut himself aloof from his species; moreover, when he deliberately and regularly occupies this perch for a certain number of hours out of every twenty-four, it is in a measure a declaration that he prefers his own society to that of his fellow-man. As a rule, his fellow-man resents this action, and is as little inclined to be wooed as the offender is to woo; people do not like to be looked down upon from a lofty height by one no better than themselves. Had Peter Lamb occupied his perch alone, with only himself for company, some tender-hearted persons, say of the opposite sex, might have taken pity upon him, and out of that pity made advances to him. But Peter Lamb was not alone; he had a monkey for a friend—a plain and offensive declaration that he preferred monkey to man—which alienated from him even those few who might otherwise have been disposed to court his society.

"He'll tumble off one of these nights," said the neighbours, "and be dashed to pieces. And serve him right!"

They did not take into account the sweet little cherub that sits up aloft to watch over the life of poor Jack—the cherub in this case being a very ugly monkey, Barbery by name, who whatever may have been his opinion as to the loneliness of our great Babylon, appeared to enjoy life as much as any monkey could do who had been torn from his native wilds and plunged into a very vortex of lower civilization. A contemplative monkey, with a faculty apparently of deep observation. A man learned in monkey ways might have plucked subtle meanings from the profound face lifted to the face of Peter Lamb when that worthy toiler of the sea held forth upon things in general.

He seemed to understand every word that was uttered, and that he kept his opinions to himself was an example which might with advantage be followed by some humans.

It has already been stated that Barbery enjoyed life; he would have been a most ungrateful creature had he not, for in Peter Lamb he had not only a master, but a friend. For want of better occupation, the old sailor set up a school, with the monkey for pupil. There is scarcely anything that Barbery was not capable of learning, except to read, and speak, and write. Certain sounds he produced which Peter Lamb understood, and he would run his eyes down the columns of a newspaper with a critical and sagacious air. I am sorry to say that his master occasionally gave him a glass of rum, which he tossed off as readily as the veriest old toper, and that he also learnt to smoke. Peter Lamb bought a pipe for the creature, with a stem which he could not bite through, and master and monkey would often smoke a pipe of choice and very strong old pigtail in company.

But with all these accomplishments, and despite Barbery's aptitude in picking up small vices, Peter Lamb felt a want in his life—the want of a human friend. With the memory of the meeting between him and Mary Earnshaw always in his mind, it is a fact that he frequently walked the streets in search of her, and that he was continually reproaching himself for not having made himself better acquainted with her address.

"I might have been a brother to her," he thought; "or if she is unmarried, she mightn't have been unwilling to take an old sailor's name, being poor and in trouble, and the old sailor having more money than he knows what to do with. Anyway, I could have been her friend, and kept her out of further trouble. The poor lass!"

No lordling of the "good old times" ever thought of his lady-love more tenderly and honestly than Peter Lamb thought of Mary Earnshaw. But his search for her was futile, and, indeed, to quote an old proverb, it was like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay.

Christmas was very near, and one night, after Peter Lamb had had his spell upon the yardarm of his mast, wherefrom he had gazed for an hour and more upon the white streets and roofs, which from his altitude presented the prettiest sight imaginable, he resolved to take a stroll.

"I'll walk to the hospital and round about," he said. "Mayhap I may come across her after all."

Out he went, holding Barbery close to him by a chain. Although he did not meet Mary Earnshaw, the night was not barren of event.

Whitechapel was a blaze of light. In some parts the road was lined with sellers of cheap goods, whose stalls were surrounded by buyers and curious-mongers. Here a Cheap Jack was selling his wares, and recommending them with a voluble humour which occasioned great merriment. His lungs must have been made of brass, his throat of steel; his deep, resonant voice was more fitted for heroic utterances than for the vending of twopenny and threepenny trash. The pith of his popularity lay in social pleasantries, which, being delivered in a jokesome, familiar style, were especially palatable to the female portion of his audience, who screamed with laughter at his good-humoured allusions to the matrimonial state. Near him was a rival who occupied a loftier platform—a Cheap Jack who dealt in politics, and whose audience mainly consisted of men, among them some who seemed to see an intimate connection between politics and pipkins. Both of these peripatetic tradesmen were doing a good trade. Here were stalls crammed with half-penny and penny toys for the Christmas-tree. Here a vendor of sweetstuff, who, armed with portable stove, molasses, sugar, and all necessary ingredients, was making hardbake and toffy before the very eyes of his juvenile audience, who were sucking their lips in visions of anticipatory delight, or in actual enjoyment of the pennies which had already found their way into the sweetstuff-man's pocket. Here was a stall thickly hung with joints and cuts of beef and mutton and pork, which were being Dutch-auctioned by a fat, red-faced butcher, who chopped and sliced his meat with marvellous rapidity and intelligence, to suit the unexpressed wishes of those who were marketing for to-morrow's dinner. Beggars who stood mute with outstretched hands, or sang hymns to an accompaniment on melodeon or American organ, or besought passers-by to pity the poor blind, or exhibited maimed limbs to excite compassion, or offered staylaces for sale; dealers in cooked whelks and mussels at a penny a small saucerful, with as much vinegar thrown in as you like to help yourselves to; costermongers selling greens and sprats a penny a pound—these were but a

few of the pictures of an animated scene in which those who were able to read between the lines could see pretty faithfully portrayed the lives of the poor of our modern Babylon.

Peter Lamb did not possess this gift of insight. The low roar of voices mingled with the loud, harsh cries of the salesmen, the squeezing and pushing, the blocked thoroughfares, confused and bewildered him. He would have been more at home on a rough sea, with a black sky above him, and a fierce wind lashing the waves to fury. As he was beating his way through the busy crowd, he felt a tug at the chain by which he held his monkey. Looking down, he saw the monkey pulling at the chain, as though eager to get at some person near him.

"What is it, Barbery?" growled Peter Lamb; "what is it? Are you growing as mad as the rest of 'em? Let us steer clear of this hurricane as quick as we can."

It was not so easy, and would have resulted in collisions had Barbery continued to tug at the chain; but the monkey suddenly became quiet, and followed his master without resistance.

"I had a better opinion of you, Barbery," said Peter Lamb, halting at the corner of a thoroughfare which offered a refuge from the fevered life by which he had been surrounded. "I thought you had some sense in you; or perhaps you're tired of me. All right, my lad; you're free to go. I'll keep no creature with me who doesn't care to stop."

With that he let go the chain. To his consternation and astonishment, Barbery, feeling himself free, darted instantly away, and was lost to sight.

Perhaps nothing in the world could have so discomposed the old sailor as this base desertion of his only friend. Tears filled his eyes; he dashed them away angrily. All the worst qualities of human and animal nature were typified in this simple act of the creature he had thought bound to him by the closest ties. To say that London was now a lonely world to him is but a feeble description of the feeling of desolation which came upon him; but to be thus betrayed and deserted was an outrage so vile that he drove the softer mood away, and gave vent to his passion in passionate words.

"Monkey or man," he cried, "you are all the same! I'll have nothing more to do with either of you! The land's not

worth living on : it breeds deceit and ingratitude. A proper return, isn't it, my lad, for all I've done for you? Well the loss is yours, Barbery."

But although he tried to brave it out in this way, he did not succeed ; the loss was his, more than Barbery's, and he felt it keenly. He had given utterance to longer speeches than are here set down, and, hating the light and the contact with human beings, had unconsciously wandered into deserted thoroughfares. He had a better knowledge of the locality than he had on the day he met Mary Earnshaw, and he made his way slowly homeward, muttering indignantly as he stumbled along, and feeding his soul with just such bitterness as turned old Timon into a savage misanthrope. But he had better fortune than that which befell the princely Athenian. Barbery suddenly jumped on to his shoulder, and stroked his face.

"What now, what now?" he muttered. "Have you thought better of it, my lad? Well, I forgive you, Barbery, I forgive you. But what was your reason? Tell me that."

Then he became aware that Barbery had not returned alone. By his side stood a man, whose face, being bowed upon his breast, was not clearly visible to him in the dimly-lighted street.

"Is it you," asked Peter Lamb, "who brought my monkey back?"

"Rather," replied the man, "it was he who brought me to you. And now I know his reason for it."

Peter Lamb pondered a moment. The stranger's voice was low and sad, but there was a ring in it which seemed familiar to him.

"Come into the light, my lad," he said, "and let me see your face."

CHAPTER XX.

PETER LAMB FINDS THE CONNECTING LINK IN A DREAM.

THE stranger was about to comply with Peter Lamb's request, which was made in the friendliest tone and spirit, when an influence more powerful than impulse restrained him.

"I am in haste," he said, "and have not a moment to spare. I have only just landed—"

Peter Lamb interrupted him.

"Just landed, my lad? You're a stranger in London, then?" A conclusion which was more sympathetic than pertinent.

"Yes, I'm a stranger here," replied the man, with a hesitation so slight that it escaped Peter Lamb's observation.

"What ship, my lad?"

"The *Falcon*."

"Trades to Australia—a rare fast clipper. Is that where you hail from?"

"Yes."

"How many days?"

"Seventy-one."

"She's done it in less. Don't sheer off like that, mate; I haven't thanked you for bringing Barbery back."

"I have told you that it was he who brought me, not I who brought him."

"So you said, but hang me if I can get the connecting link between you and me and him! There is one, I reckon."

"There is one, if your name is Peter Lamb."

"That's me, for sure, and I'm not an inch nearer the link."

Again there was the slightest pause on the part of the stranger.

"Do you live far from this spot?"

"Within a knot, I should say."

"If you don't object to give me your address, maybe I'll call on you and make myself known."

Peter Lamb gave him the address, adding :

"And hark you, my lad, I shall be glad to see you to clear up matters between us. For I'm as much in the dark here," touching his forehead with his forefinger, "as you are, standing in the shadow you seem to be so fond of. What, you're off, are you? Well, good-night, if it must be."

"Good-night."

The next moment Peter Lamb was alone with Barbery, whose movements once more perplexed him. As the stranger departed, which he did with sudden swiftness, the monkey jumped from Peter Lamb's shoulder and ran after him. Almost in the same moment he ran back to his master, and made as though he wished the old sailor to follow the stranger.

"If I wasn't sure," said Peter Lamb to Barbery, "that you had the sense of a human creature, I should begin to think you were about to lose your wits. But there's a meaning in you, Barbery, that I can't fathom, beat about as I may. His voice I've heard before, that's certain; but why did he hide his face? Can you tell me that?"

He peered petulantly into the grave face of Barbery, with whose chattering he was fain to be contented, though it in no wise enlightened him. He walked home, very much puzzled and interested, and it was not till he was in the land of dreams that some solution of the enigma presented itself. Put together in intelligible sequence, the following fancies will explain themselves:

It was within a few days of the arrival of his vessel in Hobson's Bay, on the occasion of his last voyage as an able-bodied seaman. A pitch-dark night; a storm raging, sails flapping and torn to shreds in the tempest; hoarse cries resounding, and brave men battling with the elements; hatchways battened down, and the frightened passengers beneath screaming and sobbing, believing their last hour has come. All night long the struggle of courage, endurance, and skill with wave and wind continues; and when the welcome daylight comes the danger is over; but Peter Lamb lies helpless under a fallen mast, his leg broken in three places.

He is lying in bed in a hospital at Melbourne; his ship is on her way back to England's shores. Though it is thousands of miles away, he sees it as he lies in the convalescent ward, with the windows open. In the distance he sees the sea-line, defined by a telegraph wire, and beyond it the sea he loved

so well, but which he shall serve no longer, being minus a leg.

He is well again, and stumping the streets of the golden city. His occupation gone, what shall he turn his hand to? Nothing of a scholar, with no available trade at his fingers' ends, there is here one fascinating resource for strong muscle and willing heart. The gold-fields are in full swing, waiting for one and all. If he cannot reef and furl, he can dig. Behold him, therefore, pegging away through the bush, with merry heart at the prospect before him. His pockets are empty. What then? The world of gold is his oyster, which he with pick shall open. So he wends his way through the bush, a hundred miles and odd, and camps in the woods at night, and sleeps with the stars shining on him.

He sets up his tent on a new gold-field; but he does not live alone. Good Luck pays him a visit, and likes him so well that it remains. He works as a "hatter;" that is, in gold-fields' parlance, he works without a mate. All the better fortune his, for marking out a good claim, dead on the golden gutter, every pennyweight of precious metal he washes out is his, without division. He washes out more than pennyweights; he washes out pounds' weight of gold, which he sells for something less than four coined sovereigns an ounce.

His shaft getting deeper every day, for the gutter dips at an acute angle, he begins to find it difficult to work. Another pair of hands and arms, and another man with the proper complement of legs, are necessary for the digging out of the auriferous earth. Mates he can get in abundance, now that he is in luck; but he does not see the fairness of it. Hired labour is preferable, and he falls across a man with whom good luck will have nought to do. This man is poor, almost to starvation-point; he has toiled on the gold-fields for long, long years, and it has been as much as he could accomplish to keep body and soul together. He has been the sport of fortune from first to last. His name is Paul Cumberland. A strangely silent, strangely patient man; always sad, but never querulous or complaining; one who never mixes with his fellow-men, who never joins them in their revels, who never takes sides in quarrels, who never makes friendships. For which reasons—emphasized as they are by persistent bad fortune—he is avoided as he wishes to be, and lives a lonely life.

Peter Lamb does not know what it is that draws him to Paul Cumberland, unless it be compassion for his forlorn condition. He does not stop to analyze his motives. He wants a workman, and Paul Cumberland presents himself. He does not haggle for terms. He asks for his services a wage so moderate that Peter Lamb at once engages him, and does not stop to consider that the weekly sum for which the man is willing to work will barely keep him in food.

Just before this time Peter Lamb has admitted into his confidence and companionship a strange kind of mate—no other than the monkey Barbery, purchased for a song from a miner who did not appreciate his society. Between Barbery and Paul Cumberland a strong friendship springs up, which Peter Lamb notes with satisfaction. It is in the old sailor's eyes a certificate of good character. Barbery gets a splinter into his foot; Paul Cumberland extracts it, and dresses the wound, and attends to it till it is well—a sufficient reason for a monkey's affection.

Paul Cumberland presently does a greater service for the master than he rendered to the monkey. Peter Lamb falls ill—complaint, colonial fever. Through this sickness, which in its course sucks all the strength out of Peter Lamb, and leaves him as weak as a child, Paul Cumberland nurses him and attends to him with the tenderness of a woman.

He does more than this: he looks after the crippled sailor's golden claim, and keeps strict account of every ounce of gold obtained therefrom. So that, when his health is established, Peter Lamb finds himself a richer man by more than a thousand pounds. Strange that, during the many weeks the old sailor lay helpless, at the mercy of a stranger, through whose impoverished hands so much uncounted wealth passes, wealth some portion at least of which he could have filched without fear of detection, not a grain of gold sticks to Paul Cumberland's fingers.

There is a time in the lives of some men not born to riches, and who, by a lucky stroke, begin to accumulate money, when the fever of acquisition is so strong upon them that every consideration is merged into the one absorbing desire of getting more. From this moral fever Peter Lamb is suffering, and he deems it sufficient reward that he pays Paul Cumberland the wages he asked, and makes him no return for the inestimable services he rendered during his employer's illness.

The claim worked out, Peter Lamb bids the gold-diggings

farewell, and Paul Cumberland is once more adrift, to shake hands with bad luck.

These incidents furnished the material for Peter Lamb's dreams as he lay sleeping in his garret on this cold December night. He awoke with the image of Paul Cumberland in his mind.

"It was Paul, and no other," he thought. "No mistaking that melancholy voice of his. I was a fool to let him go; I should have had some one to talk to. Then, I owe him something. On the diggings I took advantage of him without intending it. A mean trick, my lad; you deserve to be well trounced for it. Barbery's got more gratitude in him than me. Spied Paul out like a flash of lightning, and brought him to me, as much as to say, 'Here's a man you didn't behave right by.' Right you are, Barbery; I played him a mean trick, and if he'll let me, I'll make it up to him."

Many a time since he and Paul Cumberland parted had he reproached himself for his want of consideration for the man's manifest poverty. It was only when Paul was out of sight that the full sense of what he owed him made itself felt. He recalled how tenderly Paul had nursed him through an illness which might have proved fatal.

"Honest as the sun," thought Peter Lamb. "Never filched a grain of gold, when he might have had the lot. Not many men in the world, my lad, who would have acted as Paul did, when he might have quietly dosed me into my grave, and helped himself to all I had. Were you blind at the time, or what? That it isn't like you, take you altogether, is no excuse. There's a time for doing the right thing, and a time for not doing it. Well, I'll make it up to him, if I can. If I knew where to light upon him, I'd get up 'this minute and go to him; as it is, I'll have to wait till he comes to me. What did he keep in the dark for? There was no one but me and Barbery, and I could tell by his voice that he wasn't frightened of us. I remember on the diggings he was always a bit proud, poor as he was. Perhaps he's as poor now, and is ashamed to be seen. That makes it all the worse for me, owing him what I do."

In the midst of his musings he fell asleep again, and dreamt again of Paul Cumberland nursing him day and night, and of his letting the man go without an acknowledgment of his kindness. He was an early riser; at six o'clock he rolled out

of bed, and smoked his pipe while he dressed. Then he went on to the roof and climbed to the top of his mast. It was very dark, and the snow was still falling. The dim shadows of men going to their work and to the early markets moved like ghosts through the silent streets. Not a sound reached his ears; he seemed to be gazing on a dead city, peopled by spirits.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH.

“MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

“If only as a proof of sympathy (which, as I have good reason to know, with you always assumes a practical shape), it is gratifying to me to be assured that you take so deep an interest in my letters. You are good enough to say that you receive with confidence the pages of actual life I am opening to you, and I infer therefrom that you are satisfied that I am not exaggerating or distorting the facts which present themselves to me.

“Although I believe I deserve this mark of confidence, I assure you that I have to keep strict watch over my feelings, in order that they shall not become too strong for my judgment. To this end, Richard Freeman is a great help to me.

“‘Keep cool,’ he says to me ; ‘don’t let your heart run away with your head. Pity the unhappy beings with whom you come in contact as much as you like, but if you cry and wring your hands, your sympathy may run away with your common-sense, and you will not be able to judge right from wrong.’

“An admirable schoolmaster in the paths I am treading, and all the more to be respected and admired from the knowledge that, while he gazes around with stern, determined eyes, his heart is beating with tenderest compassion. In view of the interest you express in my communications, I shall endeavour, between this and the new year, to snatch an hour or two occasionally for the purpose of writing to you.

“There is much that I could say which, for lack of time, I shall be compelled to leave unsaid, and it will be in my power only to record those incidents which most nearly touch me and appeal to me. Let me confess to you that in these last few words there is a pregnant suggestiveness ; my heart at this moment is deeply stirred by a new experience, and I shall make no attempt at concealment, despite the fact that I am selfishly interested in it.

"It is with many people a belief that the life of the poor is monotonous in its sameness, and presents but little variety. It is an erroneous belief. I doubt whether, in any grade of society, human passion and feeling have such varied play as among the poor. Unsatisfied longings and desires, the daily struggles, the necessity that weighs upon them to make every passing hour profitable and of practical utility, the alternate hope and despair, caused by such simple and natural circumstances as changes in the weather, in those who gain their living in the streets—a thousand matters such as these help to produce the most startling colours and contrasts. If you seek the truest depiction of human feeling, unadulterated by affectations, you must seek it amongst the poor.

"I am writing on Christmas Eve. In an hour I have an appointment with Freeman; until then the time is my own. Our preparations for the Christmas dinner to-morrow are completed; we shall have a busy day. Our principal business to-night is to leave at certain places, a list of which is duly prepared, meat, bread, potatoes, tea, and sugar, for Christmas dinners for those to whom I made brief reference in my last letter—the poor who would rather starve than beg. To most of these the food will be a surprise, and it will be so given as not to wound their pride. I also have a little task to perform on my own account, mention of which precludes the new experience I have already incidentally referred to.

"It commenced in an ordinary enough way. A small gathering of people in Cheapside, chiefly of the respectable class, surrounding an old man with long white hair, upon whom a policeman had laid hands. This old man held on his arm an open basket containing a few common toys, the entire value of which could not have exceeded sixpence. A gentleman had accused him of begging, to which accusation the old man had not replied; in a petulant moment, which, as you will presently see, caused him some qualms of conscience, the gentleman had given the toy-seller into custody.

"It appeared that he was indeed a toy-seller, and no beggar, and a working-man in the crowd spoke to the policeman to this effect, and stated that the old man was neither begging nor soliciting custom for his penny toys. He added weight to his testimony by offering to give his name, and by saying that he was familiar with the figure of the toy-seller, who in a quiet

harmless way had been in the habit for years of walking westward to dispose of his humble merchandise.

"This defence inflamed the petulant gentleman, who, seeming to perceive in the working-man (perhaps because the latter was very much in earnest) an enemy to his class, insisted upon the policeman taking the old man at once before the magistrate. By this time both the gentleman and the working-man had worked themselves into an unreasonable state of antagonism towards each other, and were ready to exchange much more uncharitable sentiments than had already been expressed. As the policeman had led the old toy-seller away, the working-man declared his intention of accompanying them to the magistrate's court, and giving his evidence in favour of the accused, adding that although he could not afford to lose an hour, he would submit to the loss in the cause of justice.

"The toy-seller patiently submitted to be led away; he made no resistance, he uttered no word: and I, who followed the interested parties to the court, saw that this patient, uncomplaining submission was having its effect upon the gentleman, who, beginning to cool down, already regretted that he had allowed his passion to obtain the mastery of him. Had not the working-man formed an important member of the little knot of people moving towards the court, and had he not continued to dilate, now in heated terms, upon the injustice that was being inflicted upon the toy-seller, 'because he happened to be poor,' I have no doubt that the gentleman would have withdrawn his charge, and that the old toy-seller would have been set at liberty. The indignant attitude of the working-man prevented this wiser and more charitable course, and in a few minutes we were all inside the court, in which such impromptu cases as this are generally dealt with off-hand.

"It will be as well for me to state here that it was not because I took any special interest in this particular case, of the true nature of which I was indeed ignorant, coming upon the scene late as I did, nor because I had any evidence to give which would be in favour of the toy-seller, that I felt myself impelled to see the issue of it. The simple fact is that I was in some undefinable way most compassionately impressed by the face of the old man; I did not know him, I had never to my knowledge seen him before that day, and yet as I gazed upon his face I was conscious of the stirring of an old memory

which had slumbered for years. That I could not mentally trace it to its source did not weaken the impression; and it was this strange impression that led me to the court.

"The magistrate upon the bench was Mr. Pennyfold, who sits regularly in the court, and adjudicates upon such-like cases as the one now brought before him. I was familiar with Mr. Pennyfold's name, and had indirectly heard that he was a gentleman who took great interest in the poorer classes, and who assumed to be an authority upon all questions affecting them. The opportunity, therefore, of thus accidentally being able to see how he would dispose of this case, in which the offender was a poor and apparently unoffending person, was not unattractive to me.

"Upon the policeman stating that it was a begging case, the magistrate looked up sharply, and cast suspicious eyes upon the old toy-seller.

"'What name does the man give?' asked Mr. Pennyfold.

"The policeman replied that he could obtain no answer from the accused, who appeared to be unconscious of the questions put to him. The gentleman upon whose information the charge was laid gave his evidence reluctantly; he was evidently annoyed, as I was myself, at the magistrate's inimical attitude towards the accused, and the case of begging, according to his evidence, was by no means clearly made out. This did not seem to please Mr. Pennyfold, and when the working-man stepped forward to speak in favour of the accused, Mr. Pennyfold was particularly sharp with him. He happened, however, to have a shrewd witness to deal with, and the working-man, determined not to injure the toy-seller, kept himself cool, and gave his evidence clearly. Nothing could be weaker than the case presented to the magistrate, and I fully expected that the toy-seller would be at once discharged; but, to my astonishment, Mr. Pennyfold took a different view. These cases, he observed, were of serious importance to the City, and should not in his hands be lightly passed over. They struck at the very foundations of society, and he was surprised that a gentleman who had had the courage to take up this particular case should not have had the courage to pursue it unflinchingly to its natural and just end.

"Here the gentleman won my admiration by declaring that, had he not been unfortunately of a hot and quick temper, he

should not have given the toy-seller into custody, and that after all he might have been mistaken in his impression that the man had begged of him.

"Upon this Mr. Pennyfold became very eloquent. He had not, he said, sat upon that bench for years for nothing; he had made himself perfectly conversant with the ways and doings of itinerant beggars and sham hawkers, and he was not to be deterred from the proper exercise of his duty by the thrusting forward of a sudden sentimental benevolence. The case was clear enough; the accused was begging in the public streets, and he fined him five shillings or a week's imprisonment.

"I have described this incident at some length because of the impression Mr. Pennyfold's sentiments made upon me; and I cannot refrain from saying that such men, who profess themselves to be friends of the poorer classes, are really their enemies, and that the expressions they are in the habit of using are calculated to raise bad blood between class and class. As for the knowledge of which they boast, it is mere pretension.

"The toy-seller had no money to pay the fine, and would have been locked up if the gentleman who had accused him had not paid it for him. Thereupon we all left the court. In the street the incident assumed a stranger colouring. The gentleman, laying his hand upon the toy-seller's arm, said, opening his purse:

"'I believe I have done you a wrong. Allow me to atone for it.'

"He offered the toy-seller a silver piece. The toy-seller looked at him with a sweet and even pathetic expression, and gently put aside the offered charity. It was a very simple action, but it was done with grace and dignity; and this, coupled with the toy-seller's strange silence and his most evident poverty, and also with the patient resignation with which he had submitted to the indignity of being taken into custody in the public streets, deepened the impression the first sight of his face had produced upon me.

"The gentleman was pained at the refusal, and tried to induce the toy-seller to accept the money; but the old man gently shook his head, and was about to walk away, when Mr. Pennyfold made his appearance. This case of street-begging happened to be the last which was brought before him, and the judicial labours of the day were concluded. He was now not a

magistrate, but a private gentleman; such, indeed, was his own unsolicited statement as, without invitation, he attached himself to us.

“‘But, off the bench or on the bench,’ he said, ‘I never allow myself to lose sight of my duty, and my duty now is to protest against the giving of indiscriminate charity.’ He pointed to the open purse in the gentleman’s hand, and continued: ‘If there is one evil greater than another in this land, which would be the happiest in the world, were it not for——’

“His words were cut short by the working-man, who finished the sentence for him.

“‘Were it not for beggars, you are about to say. But we are told that the poor shall always be with us.’

“Mr. Pennyfold ignored him, and said: ‘Would be the happiest in the world were it not for the practice of giving indiscriminate charity. The societies that exist for putting it down, the lectures that are given, the pamphlets that are written, to teach people better, are really thrown away upon those who ought to show themselves the most willing to be educated. Only such as I, who have to deal daily with the poor, know the extent of the mischief produced by the practice. People who give indiscriminate charity think themselves benevolent; they are simply weak-minded. In my judgment the practice is criminal, and I would deal with it as such.’

“Meanwhile, as I have said, the toy-seller had been about to walk away; but Mr. Pennyfold, when he appeared upon the scene, had motioned to a policeman, who, understanding him, had arrested the old man’s progress. This did not escape the attention of the working-man, and he now addressed the policeman:

“‘Why do you detain that man?’

“‘Move on, then,’ said the policeman.

“The toy-seller willingly and meekly obeyed, and Mr. Pennyfold and the gentleman also departed in different directions.

“I moved away with the vision of the toy-seller’s face in my mind. Where had I seen it? Of whom did it remind me? I was aroused by the voice of the working-man saying, ‘Well, good-day, sir.’

“‘Good-day,’ I said.

“‘I should like you to know,’ said the working-man, ‘that the poor fellow is really in want. Two minutes before he was

taken into custody I saw him pick up a little bit of crust, about half a mouthful I should say, wipe it carefully and secretly, and as secretly eat it. Seeing that, there was no need for me to inquire whether he was hungry or not.'

" 'Do you know anything more of him?' I asked: 'where he lives, or his name?'

" 'I know neither,' replied the working-man. 'All that I can tell you about him is that I have seen him a dozen times west of Temple Bar, with a basket of cheap toys on his arm, and that I have sometimes seen him give one to a child and refuse payment. I have heard him called the mad toy-seller, and mad, in a harmless way, he most likely is.'

" 'That was all the information I could obtain concerning him; but the adventure was not to end there.

" 'On that same night I saw him again. On this occasion he was not alone; three persons accompanied him. One was a woman, his daughter it appeared to me; the other two were her children, as I also supposed—a young man and a young woman of about the same age, seventeen or eighteen. The young people walked together in front; the mother held the old man's arm, and seemed to be at once anxious to guide and to be guided. There was no mistaking their position in life. They were very poor, and in the mother's face was an expression of strong yet meek suffering. Deeply impressed as I had been by the bearing and conduct of the old toy-seller in the earlier part of the day, I was still more deeply impressed by the face of the woman clinging to his arm. Peace and joy were not there, but, unless I greatly err, faith and resignation were truthfully depicted, and never in any human face have I seen such unmistakable evidence of a sweet and beautiful nature. I seemed to be irresistibly drawn towards her, and nothing but the consciousness that an intrusion on the part of a stranger would have been painful to her prevented me from addressing her. Her son was physically weak as herself, and I judged him to be in ill health. The young girl was marvellously like her mother, but there was a fresh spring beauty in her eyes which happily poverty and suffering had not yet touched. The movements of all the four were distinguished by a grace and propriety which lifted them above the people among whom they moved, and with whose circumstances they were on a level. My road lay in the direction they were taking, and I followed in their wake,

slackening my steps to observe them, less out of curiosity than compassion. Presently a little incident occurred which strangely moved me. The mother suddenly paused, and called to her daughter in a low, cheerful tone. The name she uttered was Philippa.

"The girl and her brother turned at once, and came close to her.

"'You won't mind walking with grandfather, will you?'" said the mother to her son. "I want to speak to Philippa."

"'Come along, grandfather,'" said the young man, taking the old toy-seller's arm, and the two men walked along in front.

"'Now, Philippa,'" I heard the mother say to her girl, "I want you to lead me as you did the other night. Walking with my eyes closed does them so much good, and they really ache a little. It is nothing serious, dear, and I don't wish grandfather or Raymond to know."

"What answer the young and beautiful girl called Philippa made to this singular request did not reach my ears, and it seemed to me an unworthy thing to do to spy upon their actions and listen to their conversation. Therefore, and because I had to turn down a street they were passing, I left them, but not before I observed the mother, with her eyes closed, clinging close to her child with a sweet and cheerful submission. They passed out of my sight, but not out of my mind. Ever since that night I have reproached myself that I did not take the trouble to learn something of them. They were in poverty evidently, and I might be able to help them. The wish to see them again grew stronger every hour, and I made inquiries of persons who would be likely to be able to enlighten me as to their story and circumstances. Until this afternoon my inquiries have proved unsuccessful, but at length I have learnt something relating to them which, were I a fatalist, would strengthen my belief in that doctrine. My informant was not able to give me their address, but he said they could not live far off. In this labyrinth of narrow streets and courts it is possible to reside for years in complete seclusion; your nearest neighbours may know nothing of you if you choose to keep your affairs to yourself and lead a quiet life. Such a life, so far as I can gather, these four persons have chosen to live: they have kept themselves apart from their fellows and have no friends. It is all the more difficult, therefore, to accurately ascertain their actual condition.

Their relationship to each is as I supposed. The old man is the grandfather of Raymond and Philippa, and their mother, whose face of sweetness and suffering is before me as I write, is his daughter-in-law, the widow of his dead son. There is nothing strange in these details, but what has startled and agitated me is their name. It is Earnshaw. The moment I heard it I knew what it was that first attracted me towards the old toy-seller. It was his resemblance, old as he is, to one whom I knew and loved in my youth. It is just possible you may remember the name in connection with certain tragic circumstances which happened many years ago. A man named Michael Featherstone was found dead in his room, and was supposed to have been murdered. The newspapers called it 'The Tragedy of Featherstone.' After the lapse of a few weeks the body of a drowned man was found in a river; this man's name was Warren Earnshaw, and it was vaguely hinted that had he been found alive instead of dead, the mystery which shrouded the death of Michael Featherstone might have been cleared up. There was a fearful sting in these dark hints, and the suspicion they threw upon the name of my dead friend moved me to deep indignation at the time. In those years, dear sir, no occasion arose for me to speak to you of my friend Warren Earnshaw. He was dead, and probably forgotten by all, with the exception of myself and the relatives who were left to mourn for him. The death of Michael Featherstone was also forgotten. Our crowded life supplies newspaper columns with multitudes of startling incidents to engross the passing hour, and yesterday's tragedies are lost sight of in the tragedies of to-day. So strong, however, and based upon such firm foundation, were the feelings of friendship I entertained for Warren Earnshaw, that he holds his place in my heart now as in years gone by. If it were possible that he could be guilty of crime, my judgment of (I will not say my faith in) human nature would be utterly destroyed. Loyalty to his memory has caused me to determine to seek out those of his blood of whose existence I have become accidentally aware, and to-night, when my business with Richard Freeman is concluded, I shall act upon the slight clue I have gained, and endeavour to discover their residence. The shadow of a deep and undeserved sorrow rests upon their lives. In the pathetic sadness of the mother's face I can see now what was hidden from me before; and if she needs a friend and will accept me, I shall esteem it a privilege

to prove to Warren Earnshaw's widow and children that I am not forgetful of the sympathy and encouragement he bestowed upon me when he and I were together in the little village of Cobham.

"I hear Freeman's step upon the stairs, and I must not keep him waiting. Good-night, dear sir. All good be yours. Believe me,

"Ever yours faithfully and gratefully,

"PHILIP RAVEN."

CHAPTER XXII.

BLIND.

Two days before this letter was written, Mary awoke early in the morning. On the previous afternoon she had sent Philippa to the firm for which she worked, with two pieces of lace which she had with difficulty finished. The money due for the lace was promised to her landlord, to whom she owed two weeks' rent. Notwithstanding the years she had lived in the house, and the struggles she had gone through, she had never till now asked for a week's grace in her rent; and now, though she had paid faithfully and regularly, when she begged for a little delay the small grace was grudgingly accorded, and the landlord had informed her that if she fell into arrears he could not allow her to continue to live in the house. She had promised to pay one week's arrears with the proceeds of the work she had in hand, and when it was finished she sent Philippa to deliver the lace and to obtain payment for it. Philippa brought home the money, which Mary immediately gave to her landlord. Then Philippa, with a sad face, delivered a message which the foreman had sent to her mother. It was to the effect that Mary need not apply for any more work till she was sent for.

"Did he give a reason for it, dear?" asked Mary, with a calm face and a sinking heart.

"No, mother," replied Philippa, "but he grumbled at the work, and said it was very badly done. He said it was not worth the money he was paying for it."

Mary sighed, but made no further remark. When she was in bed she lay awake for hours, thinking how it was possible now to keep the wolf from the door. After two or three hours' unrefreshing sleep she opened her eyes. The room was very dark, but she remembered that she had some clothes to mend, and, without disturbing Philippa, who was sleeping peacefully, she rose, and groped for the box of matches. She struck one, and knew that it was alight, more from the evidence of her inward than her outward sense. She could not see an object in

the room. She put her finger to the flame, to assure herself of the cruel fact, and then, blowing it out, she returned to bed. But not to sleep. She waited for the sun to rise to know her doom. Light came, but not to her.

Philippa rose softly ; she believed her mother to be asleep.

" Philippa ! "

" Yes, mother. "

" I should like to lie abed for another hour. I have not had a very good night. "

Philippa bent over her mother and kissed her.

" You must keep in bed, and have a long, long sleep. I will light the fire and get breakfast ready. "

" Dear child ! It is a bright morning is it not ? "

Philippa stepped to the window, and held the curtain aside.

" It is snowing still, mother, but it is very bright and sweet. "

" Is grandfather awake ? "

" Yes, I hear him getting up. "

" And Raymond ? "

" Yes, he is getting up too. "

" When they are dressed, ask them to come in and kiss me. And, Philippa, I should like you to go out with grandfather to-day, so that you may get him home a little earlier than usual. I feel anxious about him these short winter days, and he keeps out too late. "

" Very well, mother. "

Raymond and the old man came to her bedside and kissed her, and then she turned from them and pretended to sleep. But ever and again, warily, so that she could not be observed, she opened her eyes. She could see nothing before her ; the light of the temporal world was shut out from her for ever. The bolt had fallen.

They had food in the house for breakfast, and for one meal later in the day, and in her purse were three penny pieces, the whole of their wealth. At ten o'clock Philippa and her grandfather went out together, and then Mary, in darkness, rose, and dressed herself. She called cheerfully to Raymond that she would come to him presently, and that he was not to go away, as she wished to speak to him. She not only succeeded in dressing herself unaided, but, assisted by the insight which long association with familiar things confers, she made the bed

and tidied up the room. Then she groped for the door which led her to the outer room, and opened it. She was not aware that Raymond's eyes were on her, as she stood for a moment uncertain of her footsteps. He sprang to her side.

"Are you ill, mother?"

"No, Raymond. Lead me to a chair."

With a great fear in his heart he obeyed her. She drew his head to her breast, and held it there. Instinctively conscious that something momentous was impending, he waited for her to speak.

"You will soon be eighteen years of age, my son."

"Yes, mother, in a couple of months."

"Almost a man, my dear."

"Yes, mother; but I wish I was stronger."

"You will grow stronger, dear, and then you will be able to help us out of our difficulties."

"If I could only get work to do!" he sighed.

"It is not the will that is wanting, Raymond—I know that; but we must not forget that we are tried for a wise purpose, though it be hidden from us. I have never lost hope; I do not lose it even now that a great misfortune has fallen upon me."

"Mother!"

"Look at me, my dear."

"I am doing so, mother," he said, falteringly; "but there is a look in your eyes that frightens me."

"You must not be frightened," she said caressingly, as though he were the sufferer and she the consoler; "we have need of all our strength; you and I who are speaking to each other now in love and confidence, must be brave and cheerful, so that we may spare Philippa and grandfather much pain. They have no one else to look to but us: we must be strong for their sakes; and you, Raymond, *you* must be strong for mine."

"I will try, mother."

"Changes come to all in the course of life, dear, and misfortune overtakes us when we are least able to bear it; but if we are true to ourselves—if we do our best to help ourselves—brighter days are almost sure to shine upon us. Before every human creature, young and old, lies a straight path of duty; it is never hidden from us if we seek earnestly for it. It is a great joy to me to know that you will tread always in that path, and that you will never be guilty of an act which will cause sorrow to those who love you. It is really so, is it not, Raymond?"

"Yes, mother."

"I was sure of it, my dear son. As the years go by it may be that you will be Philippa's only protector, and it is because you are almost a man that I take you into my confidence, and ask you to help me. Look at me closely again, and try to discover what it is I wish you to know."

It was not difficult to discover. With a sob of pity he laid his hand upon her sightless eyes.

"Yes, my dear," she said gently; "I am blind."

Then she went on to tell him how long she had been suffering, and how gradually the affliction had crept upon her, until all hope of cure was gone. She told him of her visits to the hospital, of the kindness of the doctor to her, and of the innocent deception she had practised upon Philippa when she asked her daughter to lead her through the streets.

"And you were blind all the time, mother," said Raymond.

"Yes, dear; but it would not have made me well to let Philippa into my secret."

"How could *we* have been so blind," he cried in self-reproach, "as not to see your suffering? Oh, mother, mother!"

"Child," she said with a sweet smile, "I was more cunning than you, that is all; and it gave me pleasure to spare you pain. And after all you could do me no good."

Then she went on and told him of their circumstances, and of the absolute necessity that lay upon her to provide food for the home.

"But how can you do it, mother?" he cried in the same self-reproachful tone, "now that you cannot see?"

"It may be a blessing to me," she said, striving to speak with calmness, for she was approaching a point which caused her to thrill with shame; "it may help me in the duty that lies before me. You cannot get work yet—"

"No, mother. How happy I should be if some one would take me as I am, and give me eight or ten shillings a week! I would work for him day and night."

"In a week or two you may be stronger, Raymond; then you can go out again and try to obtain a situation. But it is the present, my dear, that we have to provide for: food for to-morrow and for this Christmas week."

"Christmas!" he exclaimed bitterly.

"Hush, dear, hush!" she said, laying her fingers on his lips.

As she did so, tender memories of the past stole upon her when she used to bring peace to Warren's suffering heart. "You must not speak in bitterness; we must strive all the harder when the battle is going against us."

She exacted a promise of secrecy and obedience from him, and wisely led up to a disclosure of her plan. It made him blush with shame, as she herself had done; but she held him to his promise, and thereafter they passed the morning in loving converse and communion. The lesson of humbleness and submission she instilled into him was in its truth and fidelity so beautiful, that it could not fail to be productive of good in one whom she had influenced from infancy by the example of her own unselfish life.

In the evening they went out together, leaving Philippa and grandfather at home. Following her instructions, he led her to the street in which the beggar-woman used to stand to whom she had been in the habit of giving a penny every Saturday night.

"What is the time, Raymond?" she asked.

"Eight o'clock, mother."

"Leave me—I am quite safe—and come for me when you hear the clock strike ten. God bless you, my dear boy! What I am doing is right in the eyes of God!"

He left her, with awe and shame in his heart, and she stood, with her head bowed down upon her breast, waiting for man's charity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM PHILIP RAVEN TO SIR WILLIAM WENTWORTH.

“MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,

“The strangest events have occurred since I last wrote to you on Christmas Eve. In that letter I told you that, between then and the new year, I intended to snatch an hour or two occasionally for the purpose of keeping you acquainted with my movements and progress. When I returned home upon that night the plan suggested itself to me of throwing into a kind of diary what I wished to set down ; I was much impressed by certain circumstances which promised to lead to eventful developments, and it was for my own satisfaction equally as for yours that I determined to carry out the suggestion. I send you now this diary, which will explain itself up to the present date ; and I shall briefly say, with reference to the events it records, that it almost seems to me as if I had been led into this neighbourhood by destiny ; certainly the past few days appear to me to be the most pregnant in my life.

“Believe me to be, my dear Sir William,

“Ever faithfully and gratefully yours,

“PHILIP RAVEN.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY.

“Christmas Eve.

“THIS should properly be dated Christmas Day instead of Christmas Eve, for it is past one o'clock in the morning. I am sitting alone in my little room, and I am labouring under a strange excitement produced by the adventures which have befallen me since I went out with Freeman at eight o'clock, and posted my letter to Sir William. Not knowing how these adventures may end, it has occurred to me to narrate from day to day what has transpired in connection with them. The advantage gained by this course is that small important details are not so likely to be missed as they would be if a long time were allowed to elapse before they were recorded.

“My business with Freeman was to go carefully over the arrangements we have made for the Free Christmas dinner to morrow. Everything is ready and in order. The volunteers who have come forward to look after the kitchen are already there at work ; it is very good of them to give up their Christmas Day so cheerfully.

“It is right that I should say here that the controlling spirit of this movement all through has been Richard Freeman ; he is a born administrator, and to him will be entirely due its successful carrying out. He takes no praise to himself, nor will he listen to any. He goes about his work steadily and gravely, and has no consideration outside it. The last thing he and I had to do in company was to distribute the food we had purchased for those of the poor who had no Christmas dinner at home, and who were too proud to beg. It was all cut up and apportioned, and Freeman had an admirable list drawn out, which enabled us to perform this portion of our task with as little delay as possible. We travelled round in a cart ; sometimes Freeman went into the houses with the food, sometimes I. We found our mission occasionally attended with pain, but we carried it through with delicacy and consideration, and

were genuinely glad when the last portion of food was got rid of. I will not attempt here to describe the scenes we witnessed—it would keep me from narrating what is uppermost in my mind; they will not, however, be lost sight of, and in the newer pictures they presented of the lives of the poor they have supplied me with material for future work. At ten o'clock Freeman and I parted, to meet again early in the morning at the rooms in which the free dinner is to be given.

“My special business now was to follow up the clue I had gained with respect to the Earnshaws. I was successful; they occupy two rooms in a small house, in which they have lived for a great many years. I understand that the children were born there. The particulars I gathered in the neighbourhood relating to them are, that they are quiet, humble people, that they have no friends, and that they keep themselves apart from those whose worldly circumstances resemble their own. As to their actual circumstances—that is to say, as to how poor they are—I learnt very little, so reticent have they been with respect to their condition. Armed with this information, I ascended the stairs which led to their apartments, and knocked at the door. It was opened by a female whose face I could not see. The passage was dark, and there was no light in the room. I inquired if Mrs. Earnshaw lived there, and when I received an answer in the affirmative I knew that it was the young girl, Philippa, who stood before me.

“‘Does Mrs. Earnshaw live here?’ I asked.

“‘Yes,’ she replied.

“‘Who is there, Philippa?’ called a voice from the further end of the dark room.

“‘A gentleman, grandfather,’ she said, slightly raising her voice, ‘asking for mother.’

“‘A friend,’ I added, ‘who wishes her well, and would like to say a few words to her.’

“‘Let him come in, then, Philippa,’ said the grandfather; ‘we haven’t so many friends that we can afford to send one away.’

“There was no complaint in the old man’s tone; it was a simple and gentle statement of a fact which had long been resignedly accepted. The young girl stepped aside, and I entered the room. As I did so, the old man came forward, and I dimly recognised the form of the toy-seller.

“‘You will excuse our receiving you in the dark,’ he said, and waited for me to proceed.

“‘He had no need to tell me that they were in the dark because they could not afford a candle; I divined that easily enough. The absence of light enabled me to come to a conclusion with respect to him and his grandchild. There is something distinctive in voice which visible impressions seldom destroy. Simply to hear the old man and the young girl speak was a sufficient assurance that I was in the presence of a gentleman and a lady; there was an unmistakable air of good-breeding in their tones.

“‘I wished to speak to Mrs. Earnshaw,’ I said.

“‘My daughter is out,’ said the old man, ‘and will not return till late. She did not say, Philippa, did she, that she would be home earlier than she was last night?’

“‘No, grandfather,’ said the young girl.

“‘This is the third night she has been so late,’ continued the old man, ‘and we are not easy in our minds about her, especially as we know that a great misfortune has befallen her. I cannot tell you how deeply it has distressed us—and she bears her trouble, sir, with the patience of an angel. Indeed, indeed she is one! She has been the light of our home for I can’t count how many years. Are you a doctor, sir?’

“‘No,’ I replied, ‘May I, who have none but a friendly feeling towards her, take the liberty of inquiring the nature of this misfortune?’

“‘She has been suffering for some time with her eyes, and we fear that she is blind.’

“‘Is she out alone, then?’

“‘No; our boy Raymond is with her. We never question what she does, knowing for so many years—though it does not seem so long to me as it does to her—that she has always been right in everything she has undertaken. Philippa and I have the best reasons for knowing that, have we not, my dear? So, when she bids us not ask questions we obey her. Poor Mary!’

“‘It is a bitterly cold night for her to be out in her condition,’ I observed.

“‘It is indeed, sir,’ said the old man, ‘but we have implicit trust in her. We never doubt or question her; she has borne the burden of everything from the day we lost our dear Warren, and when she declares that things are sure to come right, we

are satisfied that it will be so. My dear Mary is not only the sweetest and tenderest woman—she is the wisest as well. I should not speak to you so openly, sir, if you had not introduced yourself as a friend. Yet we do not know your name.'

"I had started at the old man's mention of his dead son, but it seemed to open a road for more intimate communication, and I now briefly said, 'My name is Philip Raven.'

"'Philip Raven—Philip Raven!' repeated the old man, raising his hand to his head; I had become accustomed to the darkness, and I could dimly discern certain movements. 'It sounds familiar to me. Perhaps you remember it, Philippa?'

"'No, grandfather.'

"'It may be,' I said, 'that your son Warren—'

"'My dear son Warren,' he interposed. 'My dear, dear son Warren!'

"'It may be,' I continued, 'that when he was with you he mentioned my name to you.'

"'It may be so,' said the old man with great eagerness. 'You must have known him, then.'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I knew him when I was quite a lad. We were not long acquainted, but I grew to love and honour him.'

"Involuntarily Philippa moved a little closer to me, and I heard a sound like a sob from the old man. I had touched the right chord.

"'Ah, Philippa!' said the old man, 'if our dear mother were home, how glad those words would make her! It is strange, sir, but Warren's name has not been spoken to us by a stranger for many, many years. Knowing him, it is natural that you should love and honour him, as we who knew him best do with all our hearts and souls. But there were some who were not so just and kind. Is it really so, Philippa, or am I dreaming? What was the name of that man who tortured and persecuted him—what was his name? I have it—Featherstone—Michael Featherstone, a man I rescued from the streets when he was a boy, and who repaid me and Warren with the basest ingratitude. How long ago was it? It seems but yesterday, and yet you were a baby at the time. What step is that I hear on the stairs?'

"He strode to the door, and threw it open, and stood upon the threshold listening to a sound which reached no ears but his. Philippa came quite close to me, and whispered:

“ ‘You may not be aware, sir, that grandfather sometimes wanders in his mind. He will not understand anything you say to him now. He is coming back ; do not speak to him any more, but go quietly away. If you don’t mind waiting a few minutes outside, I will come to you presently when he is quieter. Thank you, sir.’ ”

“She thanked me because I had pressed her hand as a sign of compliance with her wish. I left the room, and closed the door behind me, and presently she stepped out of the room and stood by my side.

“ ‘He is quieter now, sir ; he is as gentle as a child when these fits come upon him. Sometimes he does not speak for days together. Is it true, sir, that you knew my father ? ’ ”

“ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I knew him over twenty years ago in Cobham. Perhaps you have heard your mother speak of the village.’ ”

“ ‘Yes, sir, but not lately ; we have had so many things to think of.’ Her voice faltered, and I understood that the things she referred to were troubles which pressed sorely upon them. ‘I will tell my mother that you called. Have you any message to leave for her ? ’ ”

“ ‘No,’ I said, ‘except that I will call soon again, and hope then to be able to say a few words to her. Say that it is by accident I heard of her and where she lived, and that it was out of the loving remembrance I bear of your father that I wish to make her acquaintance.’ ”

“ ‘She will not be able to see you, sir,’ said the young girl, and I knew from her tones that she was crying ; ‘she is utterly blind, and though she tries to deceive us, and has deceived us for so many years, we fear that her sight is entirely gone. It is a dreadful grief, sir, and we suffer almost as much as she does. We reproach ourselves for not seeing what was coming, and for not trying to lighten her work for her ; but she was so sweet and patient and unselfish, that she would not let us see. I feel as if I had been guilty of a crime.’ ”

“ ‘What she did,’ I said, ‘was done to save you pain.’ ”

“ ‘I know ; but that should not have kept us from our duty. Your words have been so kind, sir, that I speak to you as a friend, though we have never met till to-night.’ ”

“ ‘You may trust me,’ I said, much moved ; ‘it is my earnest desire to be your friend.’ ”

“‘It seems to me,’ she pursued, ‘that my dear mother is punishing me by keeping me out of her confidence. This is the third night she has been away from us, and she will not tell us where she goes to, nor what she is doing. If you will not mind my saying so, I appear to myself to have quite suddenly awoke from a dream, during which I have been a careless child, only too glad to be fed and clothed and petted by the dearest mother that ever lived. Yes ; I am no longer a child ; I am a woman, and it is my duty now to take the load from my dear mother, and work for her as she has done for me. You say you come as a friend. Do you think you could help us ? And pray, pray do not think me bold for asking so openly !’

“‘Indeed,’ I said, ‘no such thought is in my mind. You inspire in me respect and esteem. It is possible I may be able to help you.’

“‘It must be in one way only,’ she said, making a great effort to keep back her tears ; ‘it must not be by offering us money ; we could not accept it. There is no shame in being poor—we cannot help it. My mother was a lace-worker, and could do the most beautiful work, and so has been able to earn sufficient to keep our home together. But during the whole of this year she has been suffering so with blindness creeping upon her—I am trying not to cry, sir ! Do have patience with me for a little while !’

“‘I beg you to believe,’ I said earnestly, ‘that I am animated only by sympathy and respect for you and yours. Do not hurry ; my time is my own ; I have nothing more to do to-night.’

“‘You are very good, sir ; your visit is a blessing. While my mother’s dear eyes were growing weaker and weaker, it could not be but that her work did not continue to be so good as it was ; and her employers complained of it, and gave her coarser work to do, which made it all the harder for her ; and now she cannot do any. Night after night, sir, has she stopped up, while we were asleep, toiling for us ; and if we were to ask her what is her greatest misfortune, her answer would be that she could no longer slave for us as she has been doing so long. Her sorrow is not for herself ; it is for us. Yes, I have been dreaming, and it is only now I can see what I ought to have seen years ago. I was saying, sir, if by God’s blessing you can help us, it must be only in one way. I have a brother,

Raymond ; he is my age ; we are twins. He was in a situation, but was obliged to leave it in consequence of illness. He is still weak, but he is determined to get strong, so that he may work. You might be able to obtain a situation for him ; it doesn't matter how humble it is, and how poorly paid ; he will do his best in it, and will strive all he can to earn his money and make his employer like him. The friend who would help him to a situation would never repent it—never ! He is a beautiful writer, and is very painstaking and respectful. Raymond and I have been talking together so earnestly about it ! And then, sir, if it was not asking you too much, you might give *me* a little advice which would assist me to a situation. I am not clever, but I, too, would strive my hardest to do my best. I am young, and strong, and willing. What more can I say, sir—what more can I say ?

“What more, indeed ! I saw her in the dark twining her fingers nervously ; I saw the soul of this pure, inexperienced girl suddenly aroused to duty, the sweetest of all duties, being based upon love in its loftiest aspect.

“I comforted her ; I told her I would endeavour to further her wishes ; I promised to be her friend, and so, almost with a blessing on her lips, I left her.

“I was inexpressibly moved ; the story revealed had so much true pathos in it that I seemed to be drawn close to Philippa's suffering soul. Yes, I would help her if it lay in my power. In the sympathy I felt for her there was a subtle touch which filled me with a sense of delicious unrest. I should rather speak in the present than the past tense ; her spirit seems to be with me as I write in this lonely room.

“My immediate desire was to be of some practical assistance to her without delay. The fact of her and her grandfather being compelled to remain at home without a candle was clearest evidence of their poverty. And this was Christmas Eve. Ah me !

“I could not offer her money ; it would be a form of charity which, poor as they were, would have inflicted torture upon her. Indeed, I felt that any open offer of charity would be refused. How, then, could I be of service to her and hers ?

“I stood for a moment on the doorstep. The weather was bleak, and piercingly cold, indeed. My thoughts travelled to the blind mother. What was she doing at that moment ?

"A man, about to pass into the house, paused and looked at me. There was a kind of authority in his look which led me to the belief that he was the landlord, and also gave me a certain inspiration. I addressed him.

"'You are the landlord of this house?'

"'Yes.'

"'A family of the name of Earnshaw live here?'

"'Yes; but they won't live here much longer unless they pay up.'

"I jumped at the conclusion.

"'They are in arrears with their rent?'

"'Yes; and if they don't settle to-night, out they go.'

"'Suppose some person paid it for them?'

"'Suppose pigs could fly,' he said, with a laugh.

"'That is not the question. What you want is your rent.'

"'And what I must have.'

"'I think we can arrange that,' I said, 'if you will give me your attention.'

"Briefly I came to an understanding with him. It appeared that he had informed Mrs. Earnshaw, if the arrears of rent—amounting to a very few shillings—were not paid on this night, that he would put a broker in; which meant neither more nor less than ruin to them! The bargain I made with him was this. He was to wait for Mrs. Earnshaw at her street door, and when she came home he was voluntarily to inform her that he had no serious intention of turning her out of the house, and that in consideration of her having lived so long in his house, and paid so faithfully, he would not trouble her for the rent for two or three weeks. There was still something more; he was to say to her that, having had a couple of geese presented to him, and having already provided his own Christmas dinner, perhaps she would not mind accepting one for hers, if she had not already provided. She had been his tenant for some twenty years, and such a compliment from her landlord would doubtless be accepted with small misgivings as to its being in any way a charity. The opportunity of exercising this vicarious benevolence tickled the landlord, and he engaged to carry out my wishes. Of course I made it worth his while, and paid him for his services. Then I went my way, easier in my mind as to the immediate welfare of the family which had so deeply interested me.

"There was a mystery in Mrs. Earnshaw having been secretly absent from her father and child for three successive nights, which I was desirous to solve. I knew no road to its solution, and should not have arrived at it had I not been favoured by fortune.

"On the night, the only night, I had seen Mrs. Earnshaw I had taken observance of her, and I was satisfied I should know her again if I saw her. I looked anxiously about the crowded streets as I walked along, but did not meet her. In these neighbourhoods Christmas Eve is a market night, and the traffic of buying and selling is carried on till past midnight. Those who have not made acquaintance with such scenes would be confused and amazed to find themselves suddenly among them; but they would require a special experience to be able to read them aright. I had almost given up my unreasoning search for Mrs. Earnshaw, and was about to retrace my steps homeward, when without any effort on my part the mystery was solved.

"It was within ten minutes of midnight. The narrow street I was in was not so crowded as many I had passed through. Some of the costermongers had sold out, and were trundling their barrows away; the busiest hours were over for the shopkeepers, and they were thinking of shutting up shop. There were still some familiar figures in the road, close to the kerb, and among them a beggar woman whose attitude attracted me by its pathos. Her head was bent, her hands were folded one over the other, her form seemed to be shrinking within itself.

"It is impossible to give to everyone. I passed the woman with a sigh.

"But the pathos of the figure had sunk into my heart, and a voice within me seemed to ask, 'Are you a Christian man?'

"I turned back instantly, and slipped some coppers into the woman's hand. Her fingers closed upon them, but not as greedily as is the usual habit of beggars, and to my surprise the woman did not raise her head to thank me. She murmured something which undoubtedly expressed thanks, but her face was still hidden from me. I do not know whether I should immediately have pursued my road homewards, or whether I should have stopped awhile to observe the woman. My movements, however, at that moment were guided by the movements of two men, one of whom I knew, Raymond Earnshaw. It was,

indeed, no other than he, and the beggar woman was his mother. Then I divined why it was that this long-suffering woman had kept her pitiful mission from the knowledge of her daughter Philippa, whom I had left within the hour. I was profoundly agitated by the discovery.

"What other course was open to her? Could I condemn her? No. She inspired me not only with pity but with reverence.

"As Raymond approached his mother I saw that his face was very white, and that his limbs were trembling from weakness. He put his hand upon hers, and I heard her utter his name. Then, guided by him, she walked slowly away.

"Up to this moment I had not observed the second man, but he now forced himself upon my attention by slowly following the mother and her son, as I myself was doing. It seemed that he had only just arrived; why, then, should he follow the sad figures that were walking before us?

"Mrs. Earnshaw kept her head low down till she and Raymond reached another street; then she raised it, and I saw her face. It was, of course, at the same time revealed to the second man, who was walking almost by my side. A groan escaped from him, and there was in the sound a note of such exquisite anguish that I should have turned to him had not Raymond reeled from sheer physical weakness. I sprang forward, and caught him. Thus Mrs. Earnshaw was left standing by herself.

"'Raymond, Raymond!' she cried helplessly, not knowing what had occurred.

"The lad, clinging to me, was unable to help his mother; her hands wandered feebly about, and were seized by the stranger, who said, in a low hoarse voice:

"'Do not be frightened. Your son is here'—and as he spoke he plucked Raymond from me, and passed his arm round the lad's waist—'and I will conduct you both home.'

"'Speak to me, Raymond!' cried Mrs. Earnshaw.

"'I am here, mother. This gentleman is kind enough to offer to see us home.'

"'Are you ill, Raymond?' asked the mother, in a voice of deep anxiety.

"'A sudden faintness came upon me, mother; I shall be better presently.'

“‘Come to my side, dear boy,’ said Mrs. Earnshaw.

“The stranger guided the lad to his mother’s side.

“‘I can support you, Raymond,’ she said, with a sadly sweet smile, and then, to the stranger, ‘If you have time, sir, I shall be thankful if you will see me to my door. I am blind.’

“Although described by Raymond as a gentleman, the stranger was very commonly and poorly attired. An old wide-awake hat, drawn over his eyes, prevented me from seeing his face; I could only see some straggling hair, which was iron-grey. Determined not to lose sight of the group, I followed the three figures. They walked very slowly, and the stranger guided their steps with great care and tenderness. On their road the Christmas bells rang out, and they paused to listen; and then I observed that the stranger was trembling violently. Presently they resumed their way, and in a little while they reached the house in which the Earnshaws lived. It was a satisfaction to me to perceive the landlord waiting for Mrs. Earnshaw. He was keeping faith with me.

“‘Good-night,’ said Mrs. Earnshaw to the stranger, holding out her hand. ‘I can but thank you, sir.’

“The stranger took her hand, and bent over it; at the same time he held Raymond’s hand in his.

“‘Good-night, sir,’ again said Mrs. Earnshaw.

“‘Good-night,’ the stranger said, in a singularly hoarse voice, ‘and God watch over you!’

“They passed into the house, and were lost to sight. And then the man walked away with uncertain steps. He had not walked far when he suddenly stopped, and hiding his face in his hands, burst into a passionate fit of tears.”

CHAPTER XXV.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY.

"THE sight of this man's grief strangely impressed me. That he was a stranger to Mrs. Earnshaw and her son, and that neither of them had any recognition of him, had been plainly evident to me ; and it was in the highest degree improbable that the casual knowledge he had, within the last few minutes, gained of their poverty should have produced within him the agony of despair—by no other words can I convey an idea of the emotion he displayed—of which I was an involuntary witness. There was nothing unusual in their poor condition ; persons who frequent the humble thoroughfares in which I am residing cannot avoid contact and familiarity with the acutest forms of distress ; there must have been, then, some hidden reason for so violent and poignant a manifestation of sympathy.

"I have already said that the man's clothes and appearance proclaimed him to belong to the humbler classes, but it was not this which moved me. It was that his figure shaken by sobs, seemed to add a deeper loneliness to the loneliness of the night ; it was that in the sounds that reached my ears there rung a note of such genuine suffering for the suffering of the poor blind woman that it was not possible to doubt the man's sincerity.

"I approached him, and gently laid my hand upon his arm.

"'Can I help you?' I asked.

"He quivered at my touch, made an effort to recover himself, and shrank from me as though he feared I intended him injury.

"'I mean you no harm,' I said ; 'if I can help you I shall be glad to do so.'

"'Ay,' he said bitterly, 'I ought to believe you ; the world is so full of kindness !'

"The voice in which he spoke to me was not the same as that I had heard when he spoke to Mrs. Earnshaw. Then it was hoarse and harsh, now it was low and clear.

"I myself was in an excited mood, and therefore prone to in-

vest trifles with significance ; but my mood was also one which sharpened my observant sense, and if I placed an important construction upon apparently trivial details I felt convinced that there must be a reasonable foundation for so doing.

“ ‘ Truly,’ I said ‘ there is much unkindness in the world, and circumstances are hard for many ; but I doubt whether charity and benevolence have quite died out of the land. I know from my own experience that full hands are stretched forth, ready to give.’

“ He regarded me with closer attention, and said in a tone of surprise :

“ ‘ You cannot be a working man.’

“ ‘ I am not,’ I replied, ‘ in your sense of the term. I am residing in this neighbourhood in the fulfilment of a mission in which I am engaged.’

“ ‘ You are familiar, then,’ he said quickly, ‘ with those who reside hereabout.’

“ ‘ With many,’ I said.

“ He paused a few moments before he spoke again.

“ ‘ That hapless woman,’ he said, and his voice grew husky, ‘ and her son whom I assisted to yonder house—are you acquainted with them?’

“ ‘ I know of them,’ I replied, ‘ in a slight way. It is only lately that I have come into communication with them.’

“ ‘ Would you mind,’ he asked, ‘ mentioning their name to me?’

“ ‘ Pardon me,’ I said : ‘ you and I are strangers to each other, and I would not for the world any harm should happen to that suffering woman through any indiscretion of mine. Assure me that you intend them no wrong or hurt, and I will give any information you desire.’

“ ‘ Intend them wrong !’ he exclaimed. ‘ I ! Look into my face, and tell me if you see there any signs but those of grief and overwhelming despair.’

“ I obeyed him, and I saw in his face the unmistakable evidence of a heart torn by anguish ; and as I gazed there seemed to rise from the past the ghost of a dear and dead memorial. I passed my hands across my eyes to dispel the illusion.

“ ‘ Their name is Earnshaw,’ I said.

“ ‘ Do they live alone ?’ he asked, speaking very slowly, ‘ the mother and her son ?’

“‘No,’ I replied ; ‘there is a daughter, whom I have seen to-night.’

“‘Whom you have seen to-night !’ he echoed ; sobs choked his voice as he spoke. ‘Do I dream, or is her name Philippa?’

“‘Her name is Philippa,’ I said.

“He covered his face with his hands, and when he removed them, said :

“‘I can offer you no explanation of my conduct. Look upon me as a man upon whom has stolen the spirit of a past charged with exquisite joy and still more exquisite pain. And as you are a gentleman, I implore you, when I leave you to-night, not to make common talk of our meeting. Mrs. Earnshaw is a widow?’

“‘Yes ; she lost her husband many years ago. Would it interest you to know that in my younger days I was that husband’s friend?’

“Heaven knows what it was that impelled me to bestow this confidence upon him, except that I felt that before me stood no common man, despite his rags, and that it might lead to good.

“‘He had not so many friends,’ said the man, retreating a step or two, ‘that he could forget the name of one. Who are you?’

“‘My name is Philip Raven.’

“He uttered a cry as though a bullet had struck him, a cry that was almost a confirmation of a suspicion which had crossed me, and which was so wild in its possibilities that it seemed fit only for a madman’s brain. I will not mention that suspicion now ; some stronger confirmation is required before I am justified in letting it escape from me.

“‘Warren Earnshaw was my dear friend,’ I said, for the man did not speak. ‘In my little village of Cobham he conversed with me during my boyhood as no other human being had ever spoken ; he encouraged me in my dreams of the future. I loved him, and told him so, and often, in thinking of him, have I dwelt with tenderness upon his memory.’

“‘Is it not true,’ asked the man, ‘that a stain rests upon his name?’

“‘Man’s judgment is too often at fault,’ I replied. ‘In my mind no stain rests upon Warren Earnshaw. Scarcely an hour since I told his daughter how I loved and honoured him.’

“‘If the dead could hear,’ said the man solemnly, ‘your words would convey the sweetest comfort. They are such as

an angel would speak on this holy Christmas night. I hope'—and here he hesitated—'that you were satisfied, during those old days you have recalled, that the friend you loved loved you.'

" 'I never needed a later assurance,' I said. 'I knew it then, and have known it ever since.'

" 'God bless you, Philip Raven !' he said.

" 'I am not the only one who is faithful. He holds his honoured place in the hearts of father, wife, and children.'

" 'Of father !' he cried. 'Does his father live ?'

" 'He lives in wonderful health for one so old.'

" 'Have I not heard that his mind used to wander ?'

" 'It wanders still, at times, his grand-daughter informed me. He, also, spoke of his son to-night, in a voice of love which could not be mistaken. The ties of affection which bind the little family together are very strong.'

" 'I thank you, I thank you,' murmured the man ; 'humanly speaking, you may never know what cause I have for gratitude towards you. You may be able to render me still another service. You are acquainted with the people in this neighbourhood. A couple of nights ago I met a friend from abroad, who gave me his address. I lost it, and cannot bring it to mind. Perhaps you can put me on his track ; he has about him marked peculiarities, by which you may recognise him, if you have ever come across him. He is a sailor, with a wooden leg, and has a monkey for companion.'

" 'I know him,' I said ; 'he lives in a street hard by, and I will take you to his lodgings, if you like. It is on my way home. But perhaps you would prefer to go to him in the morning ; it is too late an hour to visit a friend, and you are doubtless anxious yourself to get home.'

" 'He cast a desolate look around, the desolate look of a man whose house was the cold streets, whose roof was the sky. It was a look more eloquent than words. 'I must see my friend to-night,' he said.

" 'We walked to the street, and I left him at the door of the house in which the old sailor lodged. This old man is somewhat of a notability, by reason of certain eccentricities of character which distinguish him. His name is Peter Lamb. Richard Freeman thinks well of him.

" 'The street door is closed,' I said ; 'how will you get in ?'

" 'I will manage,' he replied ; 'there is a light in the window

on the first floor. Do not pry too closely into my movements, I beg of you.'

" 'Shall I not see you again?' I said.

" 'I was about to ask if you would object to tell me where you live. I may or may not come to you ; I promise nothing ; I know nothing ; I am groping in the dark, and Heaven alone knows what is in store for me. Good-night, Philip Raven ; you have brought comfort to a wretched man.'

" 'At least,' I urged, 'tell me your name before I go.'

" 'My name,' he said, in a faltering voice, 'is Paul Cumberland.'

" And so I left him.

" What direction will the events of this night take ? whither will they lead me ? They are not in themselves complete ; they are inseparable from what is to follow ; and I have the strongest presentiment that they are but the precursors of matters most important in my life.

" Let me examine myself fairly. These words mean little or much ; they are written lightly, or in an earnest, serious spirit.

" Certainly the latter. I wrote them in all seriousness. I am in no light mood ; I am under the influence of new impressions and new emotions. Three figures are before me, vivid and distinct, though I am alone ; the blind mother, an emblem of patient strength and resignation ; Philippa, her daughter, sweet as spring ; and Paul Cumberland. Between the mother and the daughter there is a natural bond, but in what mysterious way can Paul Cumberland be associated with them ? This supposed link proceeds not so much from me as from himself ; it was in our interview as though he had proclaimed it. It is difficult to resist the impulse to set down my wild fancies in plain words, but I will keep my pen and my tongue in check till I have some reasonable warranty for my madness. I cannot, however, dismiss him from my mind ; I cannot, as I would, dwell solely upon the image of the beautiful girl whose tender pleadings have sunk deep into my heart, nor solely upon the image of the mother whose life has been so nobly devoted to her children. By their side stands the figure of Paul Cumberland ; I see his trembling hands ; I hear his trembling voice : and I know that his soul is quivering with anguish. Dark and inexplicable is the link which he has forged, and all I can do is to wait to be enlightened. But do I need to wait for enlightenment with

respect to the others? No. I think I know what my feelings are. For the mother a sacred compassion and respect; for the daughter—

“Hush! To say more would be to betray. As in a casket where precious things are hidden, I will keep my secret thought, so that none but myself shall know.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (*continued*).

“Day after Christmas.

“I COULD not write last night. When I returned home at a little before midnight, I was so completely exhausted that I was unable to keep my eyes open. I threw myself at once upon my bed, and fell fast asleep.

“It was indeed a busy day. Richard Freeman's statement to me that I should see a sight in Christian England which I should not forget till my dying day was truly borne out. The crowd that thronged the street before the door was opened was terrible. The rags, the want, the destitution, the ravenous looks, the pinched white faces, the hollow eyes, the strong, starving men, and not alone these, but the eagerness and ferocity, formed a never-to-be-forgotten picture. They swarmed into the room, these poor ones—gaunt men and women, many with babies in their arms and children clinging to their skirts; young boys and girls with the stamp of vice upon them, but hungry; little children unaccompanied (of whom, be sure, we took good care).

“They were so eager and impatient that they could scarcely wait to be served. Rules were broken through, of course. Some secreted their food and slunk away—they were not prevented; some, having been plentifully served, swore that they had not had a morsel; a little girl, not more than six years of age, emptied her plate into her frock, which she held up for the purpose, and dodging between the legs of the doorkeepers, made her escape. She was afraid of being stopped; she was not aware that she would have been better off by telling her story of a young brother at home who was hungry and ill, and too weak to come out. I heard the truth of this later in the day, but I have not seen the child since.

“I will not dwell upon the scenes I witnessed. I could write for a week upon the theme and not exhaust it. Sufficient to say that nothing was wasted; every scrap of food was eaten. I

am satisfied, despite the discussion going on in the newspapers as to the proper mode in which charity should be dispensed, that in our indiscriminate free-giving of this Christmas dinner, the truest and most Christian-like benevolence was exhibited. And the man we have to thank for it is my dear friend Sir William Wentworth.

"I saw the Earnshaws to-day. I was introduced to the mother, and I told her who I was, and from what reasons, having learnt her name, I sought her out. The tears streamed down her face when I spoke of her dear husband, and of the love I had for him as a boy.

" 'That was in Cobham,' she sighed, 'before we were married. I know Cobham well.'

"She held my hand in hers, as she might have held the hand of a son—though, indeed, she is my senior by a very few years. But I am young in comparison with her; it could not but be that the trials through which she had passed should have left their mark upon her. She spoke of some new happiness that had dawned upon her and hers, and it appeared to me that the immediate pressure of want was removed from them. At first I ascribed the happiness of which she spoke to the trifling service I had rendered her, unknown to herself, through her landlord, but I found I was wrong in this impression.

" 'A very wonderful thing has occurred,' she said; 'we have had a visit from a Christmas angel. Yesterday morning a knock came at the door, and when Raymond opened it a little packet was thrust into his hand. It was a purse wrapped in paper, and in the purse were two sovereigns and a card with writing on it. Philippa, give Mr. Raven the card.'

"Philippa, with a blush of shame, handed me a card, on which was written, 'A love-offering from a true friend.' I returned the card to Philippa.

" 'Are you that friend?' asked Mrs. Earnshaw.

" 'No,' I replied; 'the purse did not come from me.'

" 'And you know nothing of it?'

" 'Nothing whatever.'

"The shame died out of Philippa's face, and was replaced by an expression of relief. She looked at me almost gratefully. I was conscious of the fear that had assailed her, the fear that I had forgotten what she had said to me about not offering them money. Mrs. Earnshaw did not doubt my denial.

“‘It makes it all the more strange,’ she said sweetly; ‘so valuable a gift given so mysteriously. It shows how much goodness there is in the world. “A love-offering from a true friend!” It is a gleam of sunshine which even I can see. There is very much to be thankful for, Mr. Raven. I prayed to God to bless this good friend, and He will. I am humbly, humbly thankful.’

“In all my experiences of human affairs I have never met with any so touching and so sweet as this involuntary baring of a grateful heart. There was no repining at misfortune, no complaining at the dread calamity which had overtaken her, only thankfulness and gratitude. It did me good to sit in this woman’s presence, to listen to her gentle voice, to look upon her blind and patient face.

“‘The knowledge,’ she continued, ‘that we have a secret friend comes upon me as a blessing from heaven. We have not been very fortunate; perhaps this is the turning-point. You will see, dear children. I have always told you that things would grow brighter.’

“Then she drew me on to speak once more of her lost husband; and when I rose to leave she said she hoped I would come again. I promised to do so, with a feeling of gladness that I had gained a friend so precious.

“As on the occasion of my first visit, Philippa came into the passage with me; but this time it was in obedience to a sign I gave her that I wished to speak to her. What I had to communicate was to the effect that I had written to a friend with respect to a situation for her brother.

“‘It will be best,’ I said, ‘not to mention the matter to your mother or brother till we have something pleasant to tell. It may save them a disappointment.’

“‘I shall never forget your kindness,’ she said.

“She gave me her hand at parting, and I could not avoid observing that she was shyer and quieter than on our first meeting. It pleased me to know that we shared an innocent secret, and that there was a confidential understanding between us.

“I have seen nothing of Paul Cumberland, and I have been puzzling my head over the card and purse which Mrs. Earnshaw received on Christmas morning. Who can the unknown friend be? Not Paul Cumberland; his own condition was too des-

perate. Richard Freeman, perhaps ; he takes delight in the performance of secret charities. I will ask him.

“The strange impression Paul Cumberland produced upon me not only remains, but is strengthened. A strong desire has come upon me to see him in daylight. We met in the night, and I did not have a clear view of him ; only for a few brief moments did he allow me to gaze upon his face, and then it was convulsed with grief. If in a day or two I do not meet him, or he does not come to me, as he half led me to believe he would, I will go to Peter Lamb the sailor, and inquire for him.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (*continued*).

“ December 27th.

“ IN the course of this day I had occasion to go somewhat out of my usual track into the wider thoroughfares, and I passed the entrance to a little pile of buildings consisting of common-looking houses. I should have passed without taking notice of them, had it not been for a gathering of men and women in front, who were talking excitedly on some subject connected with the houses. Upon looking up, it gave me quite a shock to see that the denomination of the structures was ‘Featherstone Buildings.’ Taken in connection with the incidents of the last few days, there was a singular significance in my coming so suddenly upon the place. It is but honest for me to state here that the words ‘singular significance’ would certainly not have been written by me had it not been for the keen interest aroused in me by the Earnshaws. Whatever concerns them, now and in the future, cannot be lightly passed over by me. With the name of Featherstone their name is irretrievably and fatally connected, and it was from a stronger feeling than that of simple curiosity that I stopped to hear what the dozen or so men and women were talking about. A woman explained the matter to me.

“ ‘The houses are condemned,’ she said.

“ ‘Condemned?’ I echoed in a tone of inquiry, for I did not know in what sense she used the word.

“ ‘Don’t you see,’ she said, ‘that they are almost tumbling to pieces? They didn’t cost much to build. The work put into them was cheap and nasty, so, as they’re not safe to live in any longer, the Government’s condemned ’em, and they’re to be pulled down. A good job too. I wouldn’t have lived in one of ’em for untold gold!’

“ ‘Why?’ I asked; ‘because they were unsafe?’

“ ‘No,’ she replied, ‘not on that account, else I wouldn’t

live where I'm living now. There's much of a muchness about all the houses they build for *us*. Anything's good enough for the likes of *us*, ain't it ?'

"This was intended not as an appeal to me, but to the acquaintances with whom she was conversing before my arrival, and it elicited a very radical jumble of expressions with respect to the way the poor were put upon. One spoke of the state of the walls in the house she lived in ; another of the state of the staircases ; another of the state of the drains.

"The woman who was explaining matters to me cut these murmurs short, as likely to reduce her from the rank of principal to the position of a subordinate.

" 'No,' she said, taking up the subject, 'it ain't because them houses ain't safe that I wouldn't have lived in 'em, but on account of the murder that was done there. Why, I should have dreamt of it every blessed night ; I shouldn't have had a minute's peace of my life ! Does anyone know exactly how long ago it was ?'

" 'A little over fifteen year,' said another female gossip. 'I remember it well. My girl Fanny that's going to Australia to-morrow was born on the very day. When they told me about it, it almost turned my blood to water !'

" 'I believe you,' said my informant. 'I wonder you ever got over it ; it would have been the death of *me* ! Yes, fifteen year ago it was, and nothing was ever found out about it. We might all be murdered in our beds in the middle of the night, and the police would walk about as usual the next morning, for all they care what becomes of us. That's what we pay taxes for. No, sir ; from that day to this nothing has ever been discovered about the murder of Mr. Featherstone. For my part, I never set eyes on Mr. Featherstone in all my born days, and I don't know what kind of gentleman he was—'

" 'I'll tell you,' interposed an old man with a knob on his nose. 'He wasn't a gentleman at all ; he was a skinflint !'

" 'That's no reason,' said the woman warmly, 'why he should be murdered in the night, and nobody hanged for it. There *was* a whisper about some one or other who done it and run away, and I *did* hear he was found drowned. What was his name ? Does anyone know ?'

"I held my breath. To my great relief no person could give the information.

“‘He was a rich man,’ continued the woman, ‘this Mr. Featherstone, and left a lot of money behind him. Nobody knew what became of it, for I don’t believe he had a relative in all the wide world. I dare say the Government collared it; they’re ready enough!’

“‘So would I be,’ remarked a bystander with a wheezy laugh, ‘if I had the chance.’

“‘Ah,’ said the woman sagely, ‘that’s what all of us want—the chance—but we don’t get it. They *did* say, if I remember right, that he had a lot of money, too, on him the night he was murdered, but none of it was ever found, and nobody ever knew what became of it. After he died the property he left behind him got neglected, this among the rest. Look, sir,’ and the woman first beckoned me to come closer, and then pointed with her hand through the gate to a large house at the end of the blind thoroughfare, ‘that’s the house he was murdered in, on the third-floor. From that night to this, no one’s been bold enough to take the rooms he lived in, however ready people have been to take the other houses. The rooms were locked up by the police, and have never been opened since. There’ll be a chance of seeing ’em now the buildings are condemned.’

“‘When are they to be pulled down?’ I inquired.

“‘Almost directly, I’m told,’ replied the woman; ‘leastways, the tenants have got orders to move out at once. Here’s some of the carts coming. That’s what we’re waiting for—to see ’em move.’

“I bade her good-day, and walked on in a disturbed frame of mind. The thought of any association, the remotest that can be conceived, between the committal of a foul murder and Mrs. Earnshaw and her sweet daughter is monstrous and unjust. It is a blot upon all that is pure and sacred. Why, then, should it disturb me? Because I stand in fear of the verdict of strangers? I am afraid it is so. In the face of all that could be brought forward in favour of these innocent women—however pure, self-sacrificing, and beautiful their lives may be proved to have been—let Mrs. Earnshaw and her daughter be once dragged before the bar of public opinion, and the verdict would be immediately pronounced—they would stand condemned! It is this fear which assails me. The effect it would have upon them I dread to contemplate.

“But after all, to reason calmly upon the matter, what is

there to fear? So long a time has elapsed since the death of Mr. Featherstone—I remember that his name was Michael—that there is scarcely a probability of anything further being said about it. Yet the affair is not forgotten; that this is so was proved by the woman's voluntary statement to me. She gave it with relish and vivacity, and her auditors listened to her with avidity. Yes, though it occurred so long ago, the fire still smoulders which a breath might kindle, to cast a blight upon the lives of Philippa and her mother. I cannot think lightly of it; cold and calm reason will not help to dissipate my fears. I am deeply, deeply troubled. How thankful I am, when the woman asked for the name of the man who was suspected, and who was afterwards found drowned, that no one could answer her! But though no person then present could remember the name, it must be in the remembrance of some; and now that attention is aroused by the condemnation of Featherstone Buildings, the story of the murder may be revived, and with the story the name of Earnshaw. The newspapers are always ready for news of this description. I know how they would treat the theme, if once they caught scent of the pulling down of the buildings. Their industrious special reporters would rake up every item in connection with it; the report of the inquest would be reprinted; every name would be made public; they would moralize upon the pregnant ideas suggested by the circumstance of the room in which the body was found having been sealed up and never opened during all these years. It shocks and horrifies me to think of it. But I *must* think of it, for the sake of two pure, innocent beings; and if the need arises, I must be ready to defend and console them. I must play no coward's part. Mrs. Earnshaw and Philippa have won something more than a light regard from me; the feelings I entertain towards them are, in a measure, sacred; they are woven in my heart and soul. A fine chivalry I should display, indeed, were I to desert them in an hour of need, when every friendly word would be doubly precious to them! No, Philip Raven, it is not in your nature, I hope, to act so basely. They have no other friend to lean upon than you.

“I am wrong. They have another friend, at least *one* other: Paul Cumberland. Again that name, again that man—a stranger to them and to me—recurs to me with strange significance. I cannot rest. I must go to them this very evening, and ask if they are acquainted with him.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (*continued*).

“Midnight.

“THE mystery which, from the first moment I saw him, seemed to attach itself to the man who calls himself Paul Cumberland grows deeper.

“I went, as I had resolved, to the Earnshaws this evening, and incidentally inquired of Mrs. Earnshaw whether she had a friend or an acquaintance named Paul Cumberland. She smiled sadly, and said she had but one friend in the world—myself. She had no knowledge of Paul Cumberland, nor any remembrance of the name in her early days. Upon this point she was positive.

“‘My memory is retentive of names,’ she said; ‘I can remember them all, even from the time I was a little child; and since I have been married it has been my lot, until quite lately, not to make any friends. I have been so selfishly happy that it has not grieved me. Are you acquainted with Paul Cumberland, and does he say that he knows me?’

“I easily parried her questions, and we passed on to other subjects.

“But, supposing her memory has not failed her—which was by no means likely in the face of her statement that it was retentive of names—what is the natural inference to be drawn from her ignorance of the name of Paul Cumberland? Unquestionably that it is an assumed name. If so, assumed for what purpose, and to what end? Certainly not for evil, so far as Mrs. Earnshaw was concerned. The sympathy he exhibited towards her was too genuine and sincere to admit of doubt. Then his evident familiarity with my name—in what way could that be explained? The wild fancies which agitated me after I left him on Christmas Eve, standing before the house in which Peter Lamb resided, resolved themselves into something like a conviction of Paul Cumberland's identity. But this conviction was

even wilder than my wildest fancies ; it gave the lie to established circumstance, it set at defiance facts upon which hitherto no doubt had been thrown. Yet still it remained with me ; I could not shake it off.

"I did not indulge in this strain of thought while I was in Mrs. Earnshaw's presence ; it was after I left her house that it rushed upon me, and I must have been a quarter of a mile away when it reached a point of such perplexity and curiosity that it became perfectly uncontrollable. I did not question the impulse which urged me to retrace my steps ; I acted upon it, and in a few minutes I found myself again in Mrs. Earnshaw's room. It happened that, during my absence, her children and father had gone out ; thus, she and I were alone.

"*"I do not know,"* I commenced, *"how to apologize for intruding upon you again."*

"She interrupted me. *"There is no need for apology,"* she said ; *"you can do nothing wrong, I think, in our eyes. We have been saying since you left us how happy we are in having met with so good a friend."*

"*"I wish you to believe,"* I said, *"that I am indeed your friend, and that I am animated by a most sincere desire to serve you."*

"*"I am convinced of it,"* she said. *"The expressions you have used towards my poor dear husband are a sufficient proof of your intentions."*

"She had unwittingly approached the subject which had led me back to her presence.

"*"Have you a portrait of your husband?"* I asked

"To my surprise she turned deadly pale, and the face I gazed upon expressed an anguish so strong that it troubled me to see it. What was there in my simple question to have caused her this grief ? Had I unconsciously brought to the surface a painful remembrance ? I could do nothing but wait for enlightenment.

"*"I have no portrait of my dear husband,"* she said in a low tone.

"Yes, I had opened a wound, and though it was cruel to remain silent in the presence of this blind lady, who had no immediate means of ascertaining how deeply I sympathized with her, words did not come to my aid.

"*"It is not possible,"* she presently said in a plaintive voice, *"that we could have been deceived. It would be a terrible*

shock—perhaps more terrible to my children, who are young, and inexperienced in the world's hard ways, than to me, to whom trouble and disappointment are familiar. Though we have known you but a few days, we trust you and believe in you; Philippa and Raymond especially hold you in high regard.'

"Even if she had not faltered here, I should, in self-defence, have stopped her.

"'It shall be my pride,' I said earnestly, 'to deserve it. I should, indeed, deem myself base were I to say or do anything to cause them or you to think ill of me, and knowing with what faith and patience you have borne your great trials, I should not be fit to live were I capable of deceiving you, or of uttering one word to cause you pain. I know that an unshaken belief in Divine goodness has strengthened and upheld you through all these bitter years. I, also, thank God, am not devoid of faith. I, also, believe. As I deal honestly and truly by you and yours, so may I be dealt by. What more can I say to dispel your doubts?'

"Her face had brightened while I spoke; the anguish had died out of it.

"'Say nothing more,' she said, taking my hand and pressing it. 'Forgive me for my doubt of you; it must be because I am blind that I am growing unjust. If you knew how bitter is the memory you have brought to light by asking for a portrait of my husband, I should not need forgiveness; but then, indeed, you would not have put the question to me. I cannot explain my meaning now. I would not forget the past; neither would I speak of it without strong cause. It is the future only I must look to, the future of my beloved children. It is natural that you, who knew my dear Warren when he was at Cobham, should wish to see his portrait, and it was wrong in me to misconstrue your wish. Dear friend, once more I ask you to forgive me.'

"I did not pursue the subject; it was more merciful to allow her to rest under a delusion which brought ease instead of distress to her mind. When I left her she was perfectly happy, having taken pains to remove the reproachful impression that she had done me an injustice. Otherwise, however, our interview had afforded me no satisfaction; it had, on the contrary, added to my perplexity. That so simple a request as I had made to Mrs. Earnshaw should have been so

received was not to be lightly dismissed from my thoughts, and I was convinced that some weighty importance was attached to this apparently trivial incident. In the light in which I viewed it—that is, in its unexplained connection with Paul Cumberland—it was indeed weighty enough, and afforded sufficient matter for thought.

“At ten o’clock in the night I found myself outside the open gates of Featherstone Buildings. The tenants had not all moved out. In the roadway were some trucks and barrows, and people were carrying bits of furniture from the houses. Although the habitations had been declared unsafe to live in, the tenants were grumbling at being compelled to move. Curiosity led me to enter the blind thoroughfare, and go up to the end house in which the murder had been committed. An elderly man, who informed me that he had looked after the gate for years, and that he found himself suddenly deprived of occupation, asked me if I would like to go into the rooms which had been occupied by Michael Featherstone. I told him that I had been informed in the early part of the day that they were locked up, and had not been opened since the fatal night.

“‘True enough,’ he said; ‘but there can be no harm in turning an honest penny.’

“By which I understood that he expected a tip for showing me the rooms. I gave him a shilling, and he told me to wait a moment or two while he fetched a candle. This conversation took place in the passage of the house, and I stood in the dark, waiting for the custodian. He returned soon with a candle, which he lighted. Holding it in one hand, and shading the light with his other—for he had left the street door open, and the wind was blowing into the house—he ascended the stairs, bidding me follow. He paused on the landing of the first-floor.

“‘This is the room,’ he said, ‘occupied by the woman who saw the two men going upstairs to Michael Featherstone.’

“I knew, without asking, that he referred to the two men who had been suspected of the murder.

“‘It was an old man and a young man,’ he continued; ‘she only saw the face of one, the younger of the two. She could have identified him if she had seen him afterwards, or if she could have got hold of a portrait of him.’

"A portrait of him ! The words startled me. Was there any connection between them and what had passed in my last interview with Mrs. Earnshaw ?

" 'Was any effort made to obtain a portrait of the young man ?' I asked.

" 'Oh yes,' replied the custodian. 'There were all sorts of stories about, and one of them was that a detective who was on the track of the affair knew the man, who had disappeared. He was a married man, I heard, and had left his wife and children behind him. The detective and the woman who lived in this room went to the wife's lodgings, and looked over an album which ought to have contained the man's portrait. But the portrait had disappeared as mysteriously as the man himself, and the wife said she did not know what had become of it. That wasn't very likely, was it ? There was no help for it, however, and they had to take the story for what it was worth.'

" 'What was supposed,' I enquired, 'to have become of the portrait ?'

" 'Burnt, of course,' said the custodian, 'by the wife, so that it shouldn't be copied in Scotland Yard, and sent all over the country.'

" 'Where is the witness who lived here ?' I asked.

"The custodian put his finger to his lips. 'She's here still. From that day to this she's been allowed to live in the house rent free. It was no loss, for nobody else would take rooms in it. She's worried out of her life because she's got to move to-morrow. It's my belief the place is as good as meat and drink to her, she's that fond of it.'

"We ascended the stairs to the third-floor, and the custodian gave me the candle to hold while he unlocked the door.

" 'I brought a little oil with me,' he observed, 'for the lock is sure to be rusty.'

"He lubricated both lock and key with the oil, but it was not without considerable difficulty that he succeeded in opening the door. It creaked on its hinges at length, and we stood upon the threshold. We were about to enter when steps were heard on the stairs, and we waited to see who the newcomers were.

"Two men approached us, and, by the light of the candle which the custodian held above his head, I had a fair view of

their forms and features. One was lithe and bright eyed, whose age might have been fifty, with a shrewd and confident manner; the other was a wretched old man who seemed to be tottering on the brink of his grave—a worn-out being, paralyzed on one side, palsied on the other.

“The bright-eyed man accosted us briskly, and gave us ‘Good evening;’ adding, ‘As this gentleman’—pointing to his companion—‘wished to see these rooms, I thought I would accompany him.’

“‘Looking upon this place,’ suggested the custodian surlily, perceiving, as I judged, no chance of a tip from the new-comers, ‘as Liberty Hall, I suppose.’

“‘My good fellow,’ said the bright-eyed man genially, producing a bull’s-eye lantern, ‘every place is Liberty Hall to yours truly. As for this gentleman, whose name is James Whitelock, he has as much right to be at the opening of these rooms as any of the Queen’s subjects, seeing that between him and the dead-and-gone Michael Featherstone a connection of a most intimate nature existed. That is correct, Whitelock?’

“He put this in the form of a question, and the deplorable object, James Whitelock, shook and nodded in acquiescence. At the sight of the bull’s-eye lamp the custodian became instantly submissive.

“‘You see, sir,’ said the detective, for such I learnt he was, addressing me as though we were old acquaintances, ‘James Whitelock has his opinions of the gentleman who occupied these rooms, and age doesn’t soften them. Not that it matters to me, or you, or him, or anybody, at this distance of time. He has some idea in his shaking old head that Michael Featherstone’s money—whatever that may be—belongs to him. He’s welcome to the idea—and to the money too, if he can get hold of it, always supposing he can establish his claim to it.’ Here he gave me a familiar wink. ‘Would it be considered a liberty if I inquired whether you are here upon business or from curiosity?’

“‘Not at all,’ I replied; ‘my visit, like yours, I suppose, may be said to spring from a certain morbid curiosity which it is usually impossible to resist.’

“‘Well put,’ he said, and although he did not appear to be taking close observance of me, I was aware that he was quietly watching me, ‘but even morbid curiosity often includes an

interested motive. We will select, for example, an impossible instance for illustration. When Michael Featherstone was found dead in that room, I was detailed, being in Government employ at the time, to sift the matter to the bottom. I spent a good many weeks over it, and found plenty of difficulties in my way. I'll not take up your time by giving you an account of them; I'll just say that, at the very moment success seemed about to crown my efforts, my house of cards tumbled down, and death spoilt my game. Here is my card, sir; I've left the Government service, and am doing business on my own account. You won't find a better man, though I say it who shouldn't, if it happens that you want anything in my line.'

'The card bore the name of 'Edwin Bousfield, Private Detective,' with his address. It appeared to me that he paused purposely to give me an opportunity of introducing myself to him; but as I was silent, he proceeded, and gave me at once not only a very practical rebuke for my want of confidence, but a striking evidence of the extent of his information.

'“Well, Mr. Raven,” he said, taking not the slightest notice of the start I gave upon hearing my name, “when the man I suspected was found drowned my mission was at an end, and I was put upon another job in which I was more successful. But I didn't forget ‘The Tragedy of Featherstone;’ I simply put it aside, as we do a coat that we think is beginning to be too shabby to wear. That's happened to you, sir, no doubt; and it's happened to you, I dare say, to take out that coat some months afterwards, and to be surprised to find that it looks quite new. I just mention this as an explanation of *my* visit here to-night, which does *not* spring from a certain morbid curiosity.’

“I do not know what his intention was in making me his confidant but he certainly succeeded in fascinating me, and I could not resist the impulse to put a question to him.

““You were about to select an impossible instance for illustration of the morbid curiosity which proceeds from interested motives. Will favour me with it?”

““With pleasure. The man I suspected was found drowned. Good—or bad, as the case may be. As I have said, my house of cards tumbled down, and as I wasn't my own master, I had no time to try and build it up again.’

““Would it not have been time thrown away?” I asked.

“ ‘Perhaps—and then, again, perhaps not. It mortified me to be beat just as I thought I was going to score the game. And I confess I had my doubts. It belongs to my calling not to believe what I see, and to take what I hear for just as much as it’s worth. Now, say that the man I suspected wasn’t drowned after all!’

“ ‘What!’ I exclaimed.

“ ‘Ah! you’re taken aback; you’re not up to the rum dodges that are A B C to me. I say, suppose the man was not drowned; suppose he is alive, and in London at this moment; suppose he hears by accident that Featherstone Buildings are condemned, and are about to be pulled down. What follows? I’ll tell you. As sure as that man is able to walk, so sure will his feet wander in this direction. If he tries to walk an opposite way something will pull him back. As sure as he is not able to forget, so sure will he be compelled to creep up these stairs, and enter the room which he entered with his friend—a man old enough to be his father—fifteen years ago, on the night Michael Featherstone was killed. Why, sir, if he was a hundred miles off he would be drawn here, though he had to walk barefoot every step of the road. Have I made myself clear?’

“ ‘Perfectly,’ I said.

“It was at the moment I spoke this word that I was conscious of the introduction of another person on the scene. He had either ascended the stairs so quietly while the detective was giving his illustration, or I was so absorbed in it, that I had not heard his footsteps; we were still standing in the passage, and had not entered the room. In the dim light I did not recognise the figure of the man, and it was only when the detective turned the light of his bull’s-eye lamp upon him that I saw, in the person of the last comer, no other than Paul Cumberland. His soft felt hat was drawn low down over his brows, but although his face was almost entirely hidden, I knew that it was he who had joined us.

“I made no movement towards him, nor he towards me; indeed, I think he had not yet recognised me.

“Desirous as I was to meet Paul Cumberland again, why was it that I did not at once accost him? It is difficult for me to answer the question; I could not, I feel sure, intelligibly answer it. All I can say is that, in the presence of the detec-

tive, who seemed to hold in his hands the peace and well-being of Mrs. Earnshaw and her children, a power within me held me back. There was that in the detective's statement which, taken in conjunction with the sudden appearance of Paul Cumberland, warned me to be silent.

" 'I hope I have made myself clear to this gentleman as well,' said the detective, looking towards Paul Cumberland.

" 'I only heard your last words,' said Paul Cumberland, 'and scarcely knew what subject you were conversing on.'

" 'It isn't worth while going over it again,' said the detective. 'I suppose you have come, like ourselves, to see the room before the house is pulled down. It's cold work waiting out here, with a December wind blowing up the stairs ; let's get inside.'

" We entered the sitting-room, the custodian first, the detective and James Whitelock next, I next, and Paul Cumberland in the rear. The detective pointed out certain articles of furniture in the room—the chair in which Michael Featherstone used to sit, and the table at which he wrote. The inkstand and some steel pens were there ; the pens were rotten with rust, and the inkstand was filled with dust. From the sitting-room we went into the bedroom, and the detective said, with his hand upon the counterpane :

" 'He was found lying here. There were no signs of a struggle, and his death must have been very quick and sudden. A strange part of the affair is that he had a large sum of money about him in bank-notes, and some gold as well—What is that you are mumbling, Whitelock ?'

" We all bent down to the wretched old man, who was wildly gesticulating and endeavouring to get some words out. After a frightful struggle he succeeded, and a hoarse scream issued from his throat, in which could be plainly distinguished the words :

" 'Four thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, and fifty sovereigns in gold !'

CHAPTER XXIX.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (*continued*).

"PAUL CUMBERLAND reeled, and it was only by firmly grasping his arm that I prevented him from falling to the ground. As I held him I caught sight of his face; it was pale, as I expected it to be, but there was a look in his eyes which astonished me. It was the look of a man who, after having given up all hope, suddenly perceives a ray of sunlight through which he sees heaven.

"‘The gentleman’s faint,’ observed the detective; ‘and no wonder. The musty smell in this place is enough to knock anyone over. Four thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, and fifty sovereigns in gold—eh, Whitelock? A tidy sum that.’

"‘He robbed me of it! he robbed me of it!—he, Michael Featherstone, robbed me of it!’

"And the man who but a few moments since was incapable of coherent speech and intelligent motion, seemed to have recovered the use of his faculties in the light of the memory of some great wrong. As he cursed the dead, he shook his fist at an impalpable shape, and glared into the shadows.

"‘James Whitelock here,’ said the detective, addressing me, ‘was in the employ of Michael Featherstone, and to bear animosity against a good master—’

"‘A good master!’ interrupted James Whitelock. ‘He was a thief—a thief—a thief!’

"‘No one can bring an action for libel against you,’ said the detective, ‘so you can use as many hard words as you please; they will break no bones, especially no dead man’s bones. But about this money; where did he rob you of it?’

"‘In Cobham Woods.’

"The words had no sooner escaped his lips than he shrieked out, ‘No, no—not there! it is a mistake. Why do you grip me so hard? I am an old, old man! have pity on me, have pity!’

"And then he sank again into his drivelling state, and cast

vacant looks around, and mumbled unintelligibly. The detective's strong hand was on his shoulder, and he gave him a rough shake.

"‘If I could shake it out of him,’ said the detective, ‘and shake his life out with it, I’d do it without compunction. I thought I’d got to the bottom of this mystery, when here comes something cropping up that I never dreamt of. What you’ve got to look out for in these cases is the unexpected ; you never know what’s concealed in the waters you’re sailing over. Four thousand pounds in Bank of England notes, and fifty sovereigns in gold ! Now, that’s a special sum, and there’s something hanging to it. I can’t bring to mind, in any case that came under the notice of Scotland Yard in my time, anything about such a very particular sum of money as that ; he couldn’t have had so much about him on the last night he stood in this room alive. Do you know, sir,’ and I noticed that he continued to address his observations to me, and to purposely ignore Paul Cumberland, ‘that at this present moment I feel just as much interested in the case as I did when it was put into my hands fifteen years ago ? It all comes back to me as fresh as if it was only yesterday ; and though there’s no reward attached to it, I wouldn’t begrudge giving a bit of time to it, and a bit of money too, out of my own pocket, if I could bring it to what I call a satisfactory conclusion. Yes, to a satisfactory conclusion ; for as it stands it’s neither one thing nor another. It would be a splendid advertisement for me if, after all these years, I could unearth the plain ugly truth about this Featherstone Tragedy ; the papers would all take it up, and Edwin Bousfield, detective, would stand at the top of the tree. Not that I don’t stand high enough as it is, or that I have anything particular to grumble at ; but it riles me to be beat. I put it to you, sir, as man to man : wouldn’t it rile *you* ?’

"‘Were I in your place,’ I replied coldly, and yet with a fainting heart, ‘I might possibly feel as you feel ; but I must confess that I have not much sympathy for your frame of mind.’

"‘You haven’t, eh ?’ he inquired in a friendly tone, still keeping his grip on James Whitelock’s shoulder and still ignoring Paul Cumberland.

"‘No,’ I said, ‘nor could it be expected ; it requires a special education to be worked up into a state of such keen and per-

sonal interest in a matter long forgotten, and in which you are really not directly concerned.'

" 'That's as it appears to you,' said the detective with cordial approval, 'and I find no fault with you. You have not been brought up to this kind of business. I have, and that makes all the difference. When you were a youngster you were fond of puzzles, perhaps? I don't want you to commit yourself by making any admission.' Notwithstanding which declaration he paused to give me an opportunity of committing myself.

" 'Most lads are,' I said.

" 'And consequently you among the number.'

" 'Yes.'

" 'I was, and I used to run after them. Chinese squares, rings on wires, black and white men crossing a river in one boat; nothing came amiss to me, and I was never beat. I've sat up all night to put a few bits of cardboard together, and was happy when I did it. Now, this Featherstone affair comes upon me as a knot that I'd sit up a good many nights to unravel. There are difficulties in the way. There's the money he had on him that night. I got positive information; he *did* have bank-notes to the amount of three hundred pounds; they were paid to him that day, and the numbers were known; I made up my mind that they would find their way back to the bank—not at once, but in a year or two, from a foreign country perhaps. I kept my eyes open, but from that day to this not one of those notes has passed the counter of the Bank of England. Difficulty number one. Then there's this sum of four thousand and fifty pounds that's just cropped up through the drivelling of my friend Whitelock; it is certainly connected with the affair. How to get at the particulars *and* the connection? Difficulty number two. There are more links to this chain than I suspected; Cobham Woods, for instance. Is it Cobham in Kent, or Cobham in Surrey? Then, there's difficulty number three. The man I suspected had his portrait taken once upon a time, and it ought to have been in an album in his wife's possession; it wasn't, and she pretended not to know how it had got spirited away. It was a clever trick, and it is as great a stumbling-block now as it was then; for if the man stood before me at this moment I shouldn't know him from Adam.'

" I breathed more freely. I glanced at Paul Cumberland;

he did not return my glance. His eyes were fixed upon the shaking figure of James Whitelock, though I could not doubt that he had heard and noted every word uttered by the detective.

“ ‘Well,’ said the detective, with a good-humoured air of annoyance, ‘here have I been maundering away to you two gentlemen—Whitelock don’t count—for all the world as if you had a personal interest in the matter, which, as a matter of course, you haven’t got. It’s simple curiosity that brought you here, though Mr. Raven chooses to call it morbid, which isn’t fair to himself.’

“It had surprised me during the interview that Paul Cumberland had not evinced, even by a secret look or motion, the slightest recognition of me. It may be, I thought, because my face really is strange to him; as a boy it was scarcely to be expected that he should have any remembrance of me, and after a parting of more than twenty years it was natural that we should meet as strangers. Our one meeting, a few nights since, occurred under exceptional circumstances. He was profoundly agitated, and probably took no pains to impress my face upon his memory, so that he might know me again. But when the detective mentioned my name I looked at Paul Cumberland in the expectation that he would, at least, turn towards me, if only for a moment. He did not do so; no sign or movement in him indicated that he was acquainted with me. What other conclusion could I draw from this purposed avoidance of me than that, for some powerful reason, he wished the detective to believe that we were unknown to each other? Then, he was acting a part, for his own safety’s sake, and in doing so made it clear to me that I should best serve him by not claiming him as an acquaintance. I faithfully obeyed his silent wish, and during the remainder of the interview made no effort to attract his attention.

“He did not remain with us much longer. The detective, very suddenly and abruptly, began to speak of other subjects than the Featherstone tragedy, and Paul Cumberland took his departure with a muttered ‘Good-night.’

“I would have followed him, but for the fear of arousing suspicion.

“ ‘A silent sort of chap, that,’ said the detective; ‘looks as if he had seen trouble. But that’s common enough. What

really brought him here, I wonder ; and what was the matter with him when Whitelock spoke of being robbed of the four thousand pounds in bank-notes and fifty sovereigns in gold ? I can't call to mind that I've ever seen his face before, and he didn't let me see much of it now. He had no reason that I can clearly make out for being so shy, for he has never been under my hands. I dropped speaking of myself in connection with this Featherstone affair on purpose to discover whether it was that or something else that made him stand like a dumb statue. I shall come across him again one of these fine days, and then I'll see what account he can give of himself.'

" 'Not being in Government service,' I remarked, 'and therefore unarmed with authority, you have no warranty to question a private person upon any subject whatever.'

" He smiled. 'I shall know how to go about it. I am obliged to you, sir, for your attention ; what I've said has not been thrown away upon you. You see, Mr. Raven, when a man lets himself out as I've been letting *myself* out, it's pleasant to have such an agreeable audience as you have proved.'

" 'How did you become acquainted with my name ?' I asked.

" 'Bless your heart, sir,' he replied, 'I know pretty well everybody in these parts ; it's my trade *to* know 'em ; that's what makes it so strange I can't bring our silent friend to mind. Come, Whitelock, I'll just see you out of these doomed buildings, and wish you good-night. I haven't done with you, you know, but there's no fear of *your* running away. This abortion of a man, Mr. Raven, has got something on his conscience that's been there for many a long year in connection with the gentleman who was found dead in these rooms, and I'm going to find out what it is. Such a case as this is good for the liver ; I shall take it as a medicine—a dose when required.' "

CHAPTER XXX.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (*continued*).

"WE walked out of Featherstone Buildings in company, and at the top of the court James Whitelock shuffled off in an opposite direction from that which I intended to take. As a matter of fact the man did not go very far, and for that reason perhaps the detective made no effort to detain him. Within three doors of Featherstone Buildings was a gin palace, and into this James Whitelock glided. The detective and I stood together in the broader thoroughfare, and he asked me a singular question.

" 'Are you short-sighted, sir ?' "

" 'Yes,' I replied.

" 'The people on the other side of the way, now, you can't see their faces ?' "

" 'I couldn't in broad daylight,' I said ; 'and at such a time as this, in the dim light of the lamps, they look to me like so many shadows.' "

" 'Ah,' said he, 'I am many a year older than you, and I can see the face of every man and woman on the opposite side. A kind of instinct, I dare say. You're for home, sir, I suppose ?' "

" 'Yes,' I said ; 'I wish you good-night.' "

" 'Good-night, sir, if you have nothing more to say to me.' "

" He said this so significantly that I inquired what he thought I had to say to him.

" 'I just throw it out as a suggestion,' was the reply, 'and in justice to myself I'm bound to say this much, that Edwin Bousfield never speaks without a meaning, be it right or wrong. Ah, I thought so.' "

" These last words were not addressed to me, but were spoken in answer to a thought as it were. As he uttered them, James Whitelock came out of the public-house, and shuffled onwards, while a man from the opposite side of the road crossed over to him and slowly walked after him. Approaching nearer to

where the detective and I were standing, I saw that this man was Paul Cumberland. I knew now why the detective had asked if I was short-sighted ; he had seen Paul Cumberland waiting on the opposite side of the road, and wished to know if I had also seen him. The detective, with his eyes fixed upon Whitelock and Cumberland, lingered until they were at a sufficient distance for him to follow without being observed, and then turned slowly after them. I stepped beside him, and kept pace with him with no distinct purpose in my mind ; but I felt that a drama of human life was being played in which my own life was in some mysterious way involved.

“‘I have no objection, sir,’ said the detective, ‘to your accompanying me, though I consider myself now professionally engaged, and I generally prefer to work alone. Look here, sir ; I’m going to speak squarely and openly, and I trust to you to take no unfair advantage of what I say, though, for the matter of that, without making a boast of it, I can pretty well take care of myself. I am not now in Government service, and no one can call upon me to give an account of my doings. I am carrying on a private business, and am working on my own responsibility ; therefore I can open my mouth or keep it shut, whichever serves my purpose best. I mean up to a certain point ; I know how far I can go with safety, and that’s where I’ve got the advantage of gentlemen like you. No offence meant—far from it ; all I want is to make myself clear to you. Now, it stands to reason that I’d rather work for money than work for nothing. I’ve got a family, and the more I can put by, the better for me and my wife when I’m too old to work. I don’t want you to tell me anything, and I shall not ask you any questions so long as we stand towards each other as we stand now, as men who have accidentally met in an affair which interests both of them. I’d rather you wouldn’t speak till I’ve finished what I’ve got to say. Take my word for it, sir, I go upon safe ground when I declared that you have more at stake in this Featherstone affair than I have. You can’t convince me to the contrary. My interest is professional, yours is private. I’ll not take the liberty of inquiring into your motives. Tell me as much or as little as you care to tell ; tell me nothing if you don’t care to ; I’ll accept the position anyway. I give you fair warning that when you come into contact with me in such a matter as this, you have to do with a

cool determined man who knows the ropes. I'm not likely to lose my nerve; you are. I'm the surgeon operating; you're the father, or the brother, or some near relative of the patient that's being cut into. I sha'n't faint; I shall do just what's before me to do. You'll flounder, that's what you'll do. It's a hundred chances to one against you; it's about the same odds in my favour. Have I made myself understood?'

" 'To some extent,' I said, feeling very weak and helpless by the side of this practical man; 'but you must tell me more before I decide. What is your immediate purpose in following those two men?'

" 'Suppose,' he retorted, 'I asked you what is yours?' I was silent. 'But I won't ask it; I'll answer your question instead. I've no need to follow Whitelock; he's under my thumb. He has let something out to-night that I never heard of before, and I'll worm all the particulars from him as easily as I kiss my hand.'

" 'He kissed the tips of his fingers soberly and without a particle of romance.

" 'It is our silent friend I'm following, not Whitelock. Those two met by accident an hour ago in the dead Featherstone's rooms; personally they are strangers to each other. Our silent friend visits Featherstone Buildings because he is interested in the murder that was committed fifteen years ago. I will go further than that; instead of saying that he is interested in it, I will say that he is associated with it. What do you think of that for a bold stroke? But I've the courage of my opinions. Why, sir, as that man stood in Michael Featherstone's room, his very silence betrayed him; he was afraid to speak, afraid of committing himself before strangers. Not that you're a stranger to him, or he to you—that's an assertion upon which I'm ready to stake my professional reputation. Though I'm open to conviction. Contradict me, sir, if I am wrong.'

" 'I did not contradict him; I was amazed at the marvellous insight he displayed, and troubled as I was, I could not help admiring the extraordinary correctness of his conclusions.

" 'Very well, sir,' he continued, 'as matters stand at present, our silent friend, who is following Whitelock as though his very life depended upon his not losing sight of his game—observe him, sir; did you ever see a man more in earnest?—well,

sir, it has forced itself upon me that he possesses the key that will unlock the mystery of the tragedy of Featherstone. My immediate purpose is to track him down, and get possession of that key. He is as much in custody, safe as he may consider himself to be, as if he had the hand-cuffs on. The law, sir, considers every man innocent until he is proved to be guilty. I go on the opposite tack ; I consider every man guilty until he is proved to be innocent. I see, sir, that you have a difficulty in making up your mind as to whether you will employ me. Take time, sir ; you know best whether it is worth your while. I'll show you another of my cards. Mrs Earnshaw.'

"Had all the hopes of my life depended upon it, I could not have repressed my agitation.

"What of Mrs. Earnshaw ?' I cried.

"I am aware,' he said gravely, 'that you are acquainted with her. You know as well as I do, perhaps, that it was her husband I suspected of the murder, and that it was his body that was supposed to be found in the river.'

"Supposed !' I exclaimed.

"Supposed,' he repeated calmly. 'I had my doubts of it at the time, and I kept my eyes open. Nothing being heard or seen of him as the years went by, I'm free to admit that my doubts pretty well melted away. Why, sir, I kept a sort of on-and-off watch for ever so long, and I'm certain Mrs. Earnshaw never heard of her husband, from the time I visited her and told her of the supposed discovery of her husband's body, till within the last week or two I'll say. The doubts I had, and that melted away, have come to life again. Stranger things have happened in my experience than that Warren Earnshaw wasn't drowned after all, and that he should have kept up the fiction of his death for fifteen years. Supposing, for the sake of argument, that that is the case, the question that presents itself is, would an innocent man have acted so ?'

"You speak of strange things happening in your experience,' I said, in great agitation. 'Have you never heard of innocent men hiding themselves for fear that they should be found guilty of crimes they did not commit ?'

"Yes, there have been such cases, no doubt ; but if this is one of them it will take a deal of explanation. At all events I shall make it my business, if I am to pursue this inquiry for

love and not for money, to see Mrs. Earnshaw and have some talk with her; and after that, to keep my eye on her as well as on the man that's walking before us now.'

"This last shot went straight to my heart. Such a visit, and the knowledge of such espionage, would bring unendurable torture upon the beings I have learned to love and honour. It might prove Mrs. Earnshaw's death, and the lives of her innocent children would be blasted.

"It was in my power now, and might not be an hour hence if I allowed the opportunity to slip, to save them from intolerable agony. I should never have forgiven myself if I had neglected the opportunity. Time alone can show whether I acted wisely. I took out my purse, and from it a five-pound note.

"*'Mr. Bousfield,'* I said, *'I engage your services in this matter. Here is your retaining fee.'*

"*'That puts a different complexion upon it,'* he said; *'I accept the commission on the understanding that you do not hamper me in my proceedings, and that I am free to act in the manner I consider most desirable to a satisfactory end. I shall take no decided step without consulting you, but I must make my discoveries my own way.'*

"*'I will not hamper you,'* I said, *'but to a certain extent you must consult my wishes.'*

"*'You have something to suggest now?'*

"*'I have. My object is to avoid giving unnecessary pain to innocent persons. There is no necessity for you to visit Mrs. Earnshaw.'*

"*'No, there is no immediate necessity. I will not visit her without giving you fair notice.'*

"*'Why visit her at all? She and her children are undoubtedly innocent sufferers, and a visit from you will be a needless cruelty.'*

"*'Look here, sir,'* he said; *'I've got a heart, and children of my own. I don't delight in giving pain, and if I conduct myself sometimes like a machine, it is because in the exercise of my duty I can't allow myself to indulge in sentiment. It would upset the best plan an officer ever laid down. I'll tell you what I'll do. With respect to Mrs. Earnshaw now. If I feel bound to pay her a visit, and you don't agree that I shall do so, I am content to throw up my commission. And I re-*

serve to myself the liberty of doing that whenever you and I disagree as to the way I propose to carry out this affair. There is one thing I will not be bound to, and that is to let a guilty man escape. If that is in your mind, you had best say it at once.'

"'It is not in my mind,' I said; 'the guilty should be punished, but you and I, in working towards our conclusions, start from opposite standpoints.'

"'Mention one as an instance.'

"'I will. You work from the standpoint that Mr. Warren Earnshaw, whether he be dead or alive, is guilty. I work from the other standpoint, that he is innocent.'

"'That is your conviction, sir?' he inquired.

"'My firm conviction,' I replied.

"'And you wish me so to proceed as to endeavour to establish his innocence and not his guilt?'

"'Precisely. With that view you may consider it advisable to make some alteration in your method of conducting this, at present, private inquiry.'

"'No doubt of that,' he said thoughtfully. 'Would proof of his innocence make any difference in the business part of our arrangement?'

"'I caught at the suggestion.

"'It would double your fees,' I said.

"'He laughed, not unkindly, but partly in approval of the practical and legitimate temptation I held out, and partly in satisfaction at the prospect of a job so profitable.

"'I will work,' he said, taking the five-pound note, 'with the end you desire in view. I am free to confess that it will alter my plans. And now, sir, you had best leave me. I will call upon you in the course of two or three days; I know where you live, and if you wish to say anything to me, you have my address.'

"'All that I can do now is to wait for events. Most fervently do I pray that they will so shape their course as to bring happiness to Mrs. Earnshaw and her sweet daughter Philippa.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

PHILIP RAVEN'S DIARY (*continued*).

"December 29th.

"NOTHING of importance has occurred. Yesterday afternoon I received a note from the detective, in which he particularly requests me not to take any steps to put myself into communication with Paul Cumberland—not to seek him out, or be seen conversing with him. The detective's simple mention of the name is an indication of his shrewdness and activity, and the tone of the note conveys the impression that he takes something more than a professional interest in the case; but this may be fancy. Whether it is so or not, it is assuredly more advisable to have him on our side as a friend than against us as an enemy.

"I use the words 'our side' for the reason that I consider myself identified with everything, even with the smallest circumstance, that bears upon or is likely to affect the welfare of the Earnshaws. They have taken such complete possession of my thoughts that I find great difficulty in continuing the general work in connection with the poor which first brought me to this neighbourhood. It is not that it appeals to me less nearly, or that I am losing heart in the work. When my mind is calmer I shall continue it with renewed energy, and even now it must not be neglected.

"In an interview with Richard Freeman last night, during which we were discussing various matters which sprang from our Christmas dinner, I detected him observing me with unusual attention, and he made the remark that I appeared to have something on my mind. I admitted it, and said it was a private affair, whereupon he made no further allusion to it. The idea occurred to me of taking him into my confidence, but I have not ventured to carry it out. It is probable that he would not sympathize with me, his own sympathies running in a wider channel; and he might call upon me to throw aside all

private considerations, so as to be the better able to devote myself to the general good. He himself, were there any danger of his attention being diverted as mine has been, is sufficiently strong-willed and self-sacrificing to pursue such a course; his nature is larger and more heroic than mine.

“There is another reason why it might be injudicious to confide in him. The circumstances which have come to my knowledge in connection with the Earnshaws—their privations, the shadow of a crime which hangs over the name they bear, the strange ideas which have forced themselves upon me respecting the personal identity of Paul Cumberland, my contract with the detective—all these are matters upon which it is necessary to preserve the closest secrecy.

“The detective had placed no restrictions upon my movements with respect to Mrs. Earnshaw, and I visited her yesterday and to-day. I am happy to say that her confidence in me is not disturbed, and that on both occasions I passed a delightful hour with her and her children. I took Philippa two books—‘Paul and Virginia,’ and ‘The Cricket on the Hearth.’ It scarcely surprised me to learn that she had not read either of them. The sweet and patient bread-winner of the family has not been able to afford the luxury of books; and it is a pleasure to me to think that I have opened for her and her children a pure and exquisite source of delight.

“December 31st.

“This is the last day of the old year, and I have nothing to record respecting Paul Cumberland. Both yesterday and this morning I have received short notes from the detective, emphasizing his instructions as to my keeping myself quite quiet, and laying particular stress upon the necessity of my not seeking Paul Cumberland. In his to-day’s note he says:

“‘I have special reasons for the course I am pursuing. It will sound mysterious to you when I tell you that I have not called upon you because a certain danger might spring from the circumstance of our being seen together, or even from the fact leaking out that we are known to each other. In two or three days I will find a means of secretly seeing you and explaining matters. In the meanwhile I most strongly advise you, should you happen to meet Paul Cumberland in the street,

not to address or recognise him. It will be sufficient for me to say that an unexpected danger has arisen, and that I have to cope with it, in addition to the task I have undertaken.'

"There can be no doubt that the detective has the best of reasons for his course of proceeding, but it is none the less tantalising and vexatious to find my movements so hampered. Were he to advise me not to visit the Earnshaws, I am afraid I should be tempted to disobey him. He speaks of an unexpected danger: from what quarter has it arisen? Vain for me to endeavour to find a clear road through the labyrinths of this mystery. I can but wait and hope.

"Last evening when I visited the Earnshaws, they did not hear my knock at the door, and in an interval of waiting I heard Philippa's sweet voice reading aloud 'The Cricket on the Hearth.' I could not resist the impulse of playing the eaves-dropper for a few minutes. Philippa's voice is beautiful, and she reads with great intelligence and feeling. It was delightful to listen to her, and to hear the delicious laughter of the blind mother. Truly, within those humble rooms lives the spirit of home in its highest and most ennobling aspect.

"Upon my entrance Philippa ceased reading, and though she resumed it at my earnest desire, she so faltered—being, no doubt, bashful and diffident because I was present—that I took the lovely story from her, and read aloud for an hour myself. We were all perfectly at home with each other, and I felt as if I were a member of the family. When I laid the book aside I gave expression to the feeling I have just set down, and said that I never felt so happy as when I was in their society. A tender light came into Philippa's eyes, and she turned her head aside.

"'We are no less happy,' said Mrs. Earnshaw, 'to have you here. You are not a stranger to us; it is as if we have known you all our lives.'

"Before I left I promised to come and see them on the last night of the old year, and now I put my writing away for the purpose of keeping my promise."

"An hour after midnight.

"I have just returned from the Earnshaws. A new year has commenced, and a new life seems born within me.

"I had no intention of stopping so late, but Mrs. Earnshaw told me it was their invariable practice to stop up till the new year's bells were ringing, and I asked to be allowed to remain. We finished 'The Cricket on the Hearth,' and talked about it for a long while. How great is the reward of the man whose writings touch the heart of the people!

"For a few minutes before midnight we were silent. Each was engrossed in special thought. Old Mr. Earnshaw was sitting at the table, his head resting on his hand; next to him sat Mrs. Earnshaw, with her hands folded on her lap, and a solemn expression on her face. Both were thinking of the past. Time had not taught them forgetfulness, and I knew that they were musing on one who had for so many years been dead to them and the world. Philippa and Raymond sat hand in hand, and I close to the young girl before whom life's fairest page lay open. May the shadows of which she has no suspicion never rest upon that page! May a happy light shine upon her future!

"Then the bells began to ring. Mrs. Earnshaw rose, and held out a hand to each of her children. They took her hands, and she drew them close to her and embraced them.

"'A happy new year to you, my dear ones,' she said, 'and to you, grandfather.'

"'And to Warren,' said the old man, rising, and twining his fingers nervously, clasping and unclasping them with convulsive energy.

"'And to our dear Warren,' murmured Mrs. Earnshaw, with an instinctive consciousness that the old man was suffering. 'Come to me, father.'

"'How many years is it since he left us?' said the old man, taking no notice of her tender request. 'Sometimes it seems but yesterday, sometimes it seems to belong to another life. We have waited long for him, but we must not lose patience, Mary,—and now he approached close to her—'we must never lose patience. Warren knows what is for the best, but he must make haste, or I shall be in my grave.'

"'At this moment, dear father,' said Mrs. Earnshaw, 'we must have none but bright hopes.'

"'Yes, yes, Mary,' he responded, 'we will have no other; and the brightest is that we shall soon see our dear lad. Perhaps this very night! perhaps this very night! He suffered

much—more than any of us, Mary ; and if he comes we must comfort him. Children, though you never saw your father's face, you have cause to bless him, being his. A brave and loving man ! a brave and loving man ! But he had an enemy. What has become of *him*, that corrupt being I rescued from the gutters ? He turned and stung me, sir,' he said, addressing me, 'and stung our dear lad. It was cruel ; it was monstrous ; but retribution always falls upon the guilty. Hush ! is that a step upon the stairs ?'

"He glided to the door, and opening it, stood there in strange expectation of a miracle. The house was very quiet ; all the other lodgers had retired to rest.

" 'He has never,' whispered Mrs. Earnshaw to me, 'to this day learnt the truth. It was more merciful to withhold it from him, and he still believes that my poor lost husband is living.'

"In the light of my almost positive conviction respecting Paul Cumberland, and with the knowledge of the sword that was hanging over the heads of this devoted and innocent family, I could not help reflecting how much more startling than fiction was the truth which lay in the lives of the humblest of God's creatures.

" 'We must not forget you,' said Mrs. Earnshaw, offering me her hand. 'May those bells be the harbinger of a bright and prosperous year, dear friend !'

"They all wished me the same, and I shook hands with old and young, and we exchanged pleasant words.

"Unwilling to intrude too long upon them at so late an hour of the night, I took my departure at a quarter past twelve. Philippa showed me a light down the stairs.

"I closed the street door behind me, and, as I did so, I saw the indistinct form of a man on the opposite side of the road who appeared to have been looking up at the window of the room occupied by the Earnshaws on the second-floor, and I immediately divined that it was Paul Cumberland. When he heard the sound of the opening and the shutting of the street door, he advanced a step or two towards the house, but he fell back as quickly as he had advanced, and kept himself hidden as far as lay in his power to do so.

"An intense desire came upon me to accost him, but at the same time I thought of the warning given to me by the detective not to address or recognise him.

"I stood irresolute for a few seconds. It was night, and there appeared to be no person in the street but he and I; there could be but little danger, therefore, in my speaking to him, and I had resolved to disregard the detective's warning, when the sound of a man coughing at a little distance off indicated to me that I was mistaken in supposing there was no person in the street but Paul Cumberland and myself. The cough—which, from the nature of the sound, the man was striving to repress—attracted Paul Cumberland's attention, and he moved away at once.

"The moment he moved I saw a shadow follow him stealthily.

"Somewhat excited, and desirous of ascertaining whether the man who was following Cumberland was the detective I had employed, I crossed the road boldly, and passed the tracker at a spot where his face was revealed to me by the light of a street lamp. The face was strange to me; I had never seen it before.

"In this stealthy following of Paul Cumberland probably lay the danger of which the detective had spoken, and I should most likely have been the cause of further mischief if I had interfered. I deemed it best to make my own way home, and in the morning to report to the detective in my employ what I had observed.

"I walked slowly off in the direction of my lodgings, and when I had traversed two or three streets an uncomfortable impression stole upon me that I myself was being followed. There was the sound of footsteps in my rear. I stopped, and the sound ceased, I began to walk, and the sound made itself heard. I determined to fully verify or falsify my suspicion, and I set off at as sharp a trot as my lameness would admit of. The rapid footsteps following my own soon convinced me, and I resolved to get rid of my pursuer. I suddenly doubled back upon him, and, to his surprise, came face to face with him. He would have avoided me, but I would not allow him to escape, and I told him plainly that if he continued to dog me I should accompany him till I met a policeman, when I would give him into custody. This did not appear to suit his plans, and, seeing that I was determined, he stammered out an excuse and left me. But as his eyes were scanning me all the time I was speaking, I knew that he was fixing me in his memory so

that he should know me again. I reached home without further molestation.

"I close this record, which I shall forward to-morrow to Sir William Wentworth. I wait impatiently to see what the new year will bring forth for those in whom I am so deeply interested."

CHAPTER XXXII.

DR. HOWARD GIVES HIS OPINION.

PHILIP RAVEN'S diary reached Sir William Wentworth's hands in the country, where he was entertaining his guests. Among them was his friend, Dr. Howard, whom he had made his confidant in Philip Raven's affairs. He read the pages carefully, and placed them in Dr. Howard's hands.

"There is no other man," said Sir William Wentworth, "to whom I would trust this record. It is in a measure confidential, but Philip Raven would not object to my asking the opinion of so valued a friend as yourself."

"My opinion as to what?" inquired Dr. Howard.

"Generally as to these revelations," replied Sir William; "but specially as to Philip Raven in connection with the family of the Earnshaws, with whom he has come into very close association."

"What was the name you mentioned—Earnshaw?"

"Yes. The descriptions he gives of them have touched me deeply, but I would rather rely on your judgment than my own."

"There is a Mrs. Earnshaw."

"Yes; and if Philip does not err in his estimate of her, she is a woman to be both pitied and admired. Blindness has lately overtaken her."

"The name," said Dr. Howard, with an air of interest, "is not a very common one; indeed, I do not remember that I ever met with it before I became acquainted with the unfortunate lady. I grieve to hear that she has become blind, but it was inevitable."

"You know her, then?"

"Do you remember, at a dinner at your house at which that inflated individual Mr. Pennyfold was present, you had a discussion with him upon the merits of Philip Raven's book, and that I spoke to you of a patient of mine who came to the hospital to see me, and from whom I could not avert the calamity which has overtaken her?"

"Yes, I remember. You spoke of her as one who was working fatally, day and night, for those dependent on her."

"You wished to assist her, and you placed your purse at my disposal. Your benevolent intentions were unfortunately frustrated by the conduct of the lady herself, who had already refused the assistance I proffered. She returned my cheque in a letter which none but a lady of a sweet nature and noble instincts could have written. I have often thought of her, and wished for an opportunity to serve her. That lady was Mrs. Earnshaw."

"There can be no doubt it is the same," said Sir William. "Read the diary, and let me know what you think of it."

Later in the day Dr. Howard returned Philip Raven's diary to Sir William.

"It is like a romance," he said, "and I shall not rest satisfied till I hear the sequel."

"Would you advise him, then, to carry out this affair to the end?"

"Whether he is advised to that effect or not," said Dr. Howard, "he will do so. And quite apart from any direct sympathy he may feel for Mrs. Earnshaw and her family, he has the strongest possible reason for clinging to them."

"What is that reason?"

"My dear Sir William, have you not seen that he is in love with Mrs. Earnshaw's daughter?"

Sir William gave a long, low whistle.

"Is that really your opinion?"

"I will go further, and say it is my conviction; and if this Philippa, of whom he speaks in such tender terms, in any respect resembles her mother, he could find no truer helpmate. He will need monetary assistance, which of course you will give him. Let *me* do something in this good work. Here is a cheque for fifty pounds, which I should wish him to use in the service of Mrs. Earnshaw. Many a time have I reproached myself for not having sought her out and endeavoured to smooth her way."

"I will take your cheque and will add it to mine. I shall write to Philip this evening. I can plainly see that he will not be able to pursue his regular work with calmness and judgment till he has brought this enterprise to an end—to a satisfactory end, I hope. The Richard Freeman he writes of must be a remarkable character."

“A man with deep-seated convictions which nothing can shake. He is in his right groove, and employs his time nobly; but I doubt whether you or I would care to listen to an exposition of his beliefs. I think, in one of his letters, Philip Raven hints that there is a hidden danger in him. Philip is right; under certain conditions that man would take his place as an uncompromising enemy to law and order, and would cheerfully sacrifice himself in the cause he championed. There is great humanity in what he is now doing, but there is also a kind of defiance, all the more provoking and perplexing because of his sincerity and intelligence. The time is approaching when such as he will have to be reckoned with.”

They did not pursue the conversation, and Sir William Wentworth went to his study to write his letter to Philip Raven.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THOMAS MAYPLE HEARS SOME UNPLEASANT THINGS.

It was on the evening of this day that a series of very surprising circumstances, in which our old friend Thomas Mayple and his crafty employer, Thrifty Miller, played the principal parts, came to an astonishing culmination. Since the thrashing in the public streets which Thrifty Miller had received from Richard Freeman, the scheming usurer had kept himself particularly quiet. There were good and sufficient reasons for his partial retirement from society. In the first place, Freeman had dealt out his punishment with such a heavy hand that, after it was administered, it was as much as Thrifty Miller could do to creep home and plunge into bed, where he lay groaning from pain. In this condition he was found by Thomas Mayple, to whom he related what had occurred, describing it as a savage and unprovoked assault, for which he intended to ruin his assailant. A single night's reflection, however, led him to the conclusion that it would be the wisest course to take no steps whatever against Freeman; and he contented himself, therefore, with the indulgence of idle vapourings in the presence of his confidential clerk. In the second place, when he was able to get about he was received with so much disfavour and aversion that he was glad to escape from the scowling looks and open threatenings of those who had hitherto been civil to him through fear. The true story of his villainy had become known, and there were many ready to add to the chastisement he had already received, and thus pay off old scores. Not only were men ready to do this upon the slightest provocation; the women he had imposed upon and robbed would not have neglected a favourable opportunity to fall upon him. As he confessed to Thomas Mayple, he went in fear of his life. From this old comrade, whom he had kept in bondage, he received no sympathy. The confidential clerk had heard the story of the betrayal and desertion, and his careless, easy nature was much disturbed by it.

Disagreeable as were the duties he had been called upon to perform in the service of such a grinding taskmaster as Thrifty Miller, he had performed them so good-naturedly, and there lay to his credit so large an accumulation of kindly acts, that he could not have failed to become a favourite. And now, when in consequence of the general indignation he was called upon to pronounce an opinion upon his employer, he also became indignant, and declared that he had never hitherto believed that a man could behave so wickedly.

"It is a shame," said a woman, "that a man like you should remain in the service of a man like him. You see, Mr. Mayple, if I didn't know you well, I should call you two a pair."

"I hope not, I hope not," said Thomas Mayple; "I hope you don't think me as bad as him."

"Well," said the woman, "perhaps I don't; if I did I shouldn't be talking to you in this friendly way. But there's others as must think pretty badly of you. It stands to common-sense; people have got feelings, I suppose. You won't deny that?"

"I can't deny it."

"How long ago is it since you ruined Mrs. Porter?"

"Don't speak in that shocking way," remonstrated Thomas Mayple; "I didn't ruin her."

"I'm only putting things as other people would put 'em who don't know you as well as I do. Mrs. Porter was a hard-working woman, and nobody could say a word against her. She got into debt with Thrifty Miller, and he made her pay four times over for every bit of stuff she bought of him. He was her landlord, too; and when he had scraped her to the bone he turned her into the streets; that is to say, you did so for him." Thomas Mayple groaned. "Till your master began to wheedle her into taking things of him, she didn't know what want was, and till he got her into his grip she managed to do pretty well. She's a widow, you know."

"Yes, I know," groaned Thomas Mayple.

"With five little children to provide for. Thrifty Miller knew how to get round her. 'I've got some of the prettiest hoods you ever saw,' that's what he used to say to her; 'your baby would look a picture in one. Come and pick it out. You needn't pay me for it now; so much a week.' At another time it was, 'I've got a little lot of the prettiest children's hats

you ever saw ; one of them would just do for your eldest girl. You needn't pay me for it now ; so much a week.' Then it was something else ; then something else ; then something else ; and it was always, ' You needn't pay me for it now ; so much a week.' She could have done without any of these things, but her mother's heart was too big for her body, and your precious master so worked upon her that he got every farthing of her savings—she had over eight pound in the Post-Office Savings Bank—and screwed her down for a year afterwards, until he couldn't screw her down any more. Then, when he'd sucked every drop of blood out of her, in a manner of speaking, he turned her neck and crop into the streets—that is, you did for him—and still brought her in his debt, according to his books, for five times as much as I could buy the things for this very day. Have you seen Mrs. Porter lately ?"

" No," replied Thomas Mayple, with a sinking heart.

" Well, do so, and don't mind if she looks at you as if she'd like to poison you. Her children are in rags ; they haven't a shoe to their feet, and haven't had a full meal for months, with the exception of that dinner that was given on Christmas Day by Mr. Freeman and his gentleman friend. I'm afraid she thinks hardly of you, Mr. Mayple, and don't remember you in her prayers. Then there's Rachel Lavender ; before she got married she was as bright a body as ever a man set eyes on. She was earning a matter of eighteen shillings a week, and kept herself neat and respectable. But when Dick Lavender began a-courting of her, the serpent—that's your master, Thrifty Miller—crept up to her, and commenced his games. ' Here's a lovely dress-piece ; get it prettily made up, and your sweetheart 'll go wild with love when he sees you in it. You needn't pay for it now ; so much a week. Here's a silk mantle that a lady would be proud to wear. You needn't pay for it now ; so much a week.' And the same with lots of other things. The consequence was, that when she married Dick Lavender she was over head and ears in debt, and Dick knew nothing about it. For a little while it was all right, and *you* know, for you collected 'em, that the payments were made pretty regular. But how were they made ? Why, by pawning for next to nothing, the very things she owed the serpent so much for. Then Dick found out that she was in debt, and that he was responsible, and there was a row. That was the

first big cloud on their married life. Plenty of other clouds came. Their first baby was expected, and Dick fell ill. They hadn't a penny saved ; you and your master regularly drained 'em, and ruined what might have been a fairly happy life. There was a bill of sale, or something or other in the shape of a bond, that Thrifty Miller held, that gave him the power to step in when he pleased and sweep away every blessed stick of furniture they had. Well, it was done, and you had a hand in it—"

"I only did my duty," groaned Thomas Mayple in sore tribulation.

"Duty !" exclaimed the woman, who had now worked herself up into a state of hot indignation. 'Do you call it duty to break up a home as you broke up the Lavenders'—to take the very bed from under 'em, to tread upon a poor lass till she's obliged to beg a crust from them as are almost as poor as herself, to drive a decent chap like Dick to the public-house, to throw 'em on a dunghill, in a manner of speaking, after you've stripped 'em naked, and as good as saying to 'em, 'I've got every farthing I can out of you, and now you may go to the dogs ?'"

"No, no !" cried Thomas Mayple, putting his hands to his head. "Don't say that ! Stop—for heaven's sake, stop !

But the woman's blood was up, and she would not stop.

"Is that your idea of duty, Mr. Mayple ? I advised you to go and see the state Mrs. Porter and her children are in, and that you and your master have brought 'em to. Go ! and, if you haven't got a stone inside your waistcoat in place of a heart, try and console yourself, as you look upon their misery, that it was your duty to bring 'em to it. And go and have a peep at Rachel Lavender crying over her starving baby, and carry your mind to what there is before her—perhaps a deal worse than what you've already brought her to—and say with a smile, 'I only did my duty ; I only did my duty !' Do you want the names of some more as you've ruined between you, you and your precious master ? You haven't forgot Mrs. Rickaby, perhaps. She was buried last week, and her children are in the workhouse. She'd have been alive this minute, keeping on her little hosiery shop, earning a decent living, bringing up her children respectably, and helping her neighbours a bit, which she was always ready and willing to do, if it hadn't have been

for you and Thrifty Miller. But that wouldn't suit your book, so you scraped her bones and flung her into a pauper's grave, for she had to be buried by the parish. If you go to the workhouse where the children are, you'll see Mr. and Mrs. Meakin. You don't forget *them*, do you, though you *may* have a convenient memory? The old couple were as happy as the days are long on the interest of a bit of money that had been left to 'em twenty year ago, till old Meakin fell into the clutches of Thrifty Miller, who first persuaded him that he couldn't live without a silver snuff-box ('You needn't pay me now; so much a week'), and then persuaded him that it was a burning shame his old woman didn't have a Paisley shawl ('You needn't pay me now; so much a week'), and then made him go into Spanish fowls, with a cock-and-bull story that he could make a fortune out of the eggs, and so on, and so on, making him sign first one paper, and then another, and then another, till old Meakin woke up one fine morning, and found that his bit of money had flown clean away into Thrifty Miller's pockets. They were past work, neither of 'em being less than seventy, so they lived for a few days upon the silver snuff-box, and then for a few days upon the Paisley shawl, and then for a few days upon the Spanish fowls that used to lay about one egg a week, and then they went into the workhouse. Would you like me to give you a few more names of poor people you've ruined, Mr. Mayple?"

"No, no, no!" groaned the unhappy man.

"Because I can if you want me to; but you've only to look over your books for 'em. See here, Mr. Mayple," said the woman with startling vehemence. In her excitement she laid one hand on Thomas Mayple's shoulder, and pointed to the sky with the other. "Don't take your books up there when you're dead!"

"I—I never intended to," stammered Thomas Mayple.

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman, gliding now into a fine sarcastic vein, "you had an idea of going there, had you?"

"I hoped to," said Thomas Mayple, dubiously.

"No, no, my man; that place is not for the likes of you and Thrifty Miller. You'll be otherwise provided for. Why, if you showed your face up there you'd hear such an outcry from them as you've ruined, that you'd put your fingers to your ears, and wish you had never been born. And it *would* have

been better, not only for your own sake, but for the sake of those you've stripped and robbed. Your mother ain't alive, is she?"

"No," replied Thomas Mayple, with a buzzing in his head as though a hive of avenging bees had taken possession of it.

"It's a good job for her; for if she saw you now, and knew how you've been passing your life since you came to live in this neighbourhood, she'd be sorry that, when you was a baby, she hadn't overlaid you one night, and put an end to you. Ah! you may well groan; you've made others groan enough. If your old mother's up there, where you hoped to go, but won't, you may bet every nicely-shaped figure in your wicked account-books that you and her'll never meet again. And that's what you've earned, my man!"

Shocked beyond expression, Thomas Mayple beat a retreat, and left the woman standing at her street door. But he had not gone a dozen steps before he twisted himself back again.

"What can I do?" he asked feebly.

"Do!" exclaimed the woman. "Undo what you've done, in the best way you can. Bring out some of your ill-gotten money, and give it back to the poor souls you've robbed it from, you and Thrifty Miller between you. You can't call back the dead, but you can make it up to the living. But what a fool I am to stand here talking to such as you! I might as well talk to a stone."

With that, she turned into her house and slammed the door in his face. She had poured the vials of her wrath upon him, and she left him to make up the account as best he might.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THOMAS MAYPLE'S LEGACY.

PERSONS who saw Thomas Mayple as he walked back to his office thought he was drunk, his gait was so unsteady. Certainly his punishment, whether he deserved it or not, had been dealt out to him unmercifully. "What a wicked monster I am," he thought; "what a heartless, wicked monster! She is quite right—Thrifty Miller and I are a pair; we deserve to be hanged. And after that"—he shuddered, and looked up, and fancied he saw his old mother looking down sadly upon him from the skies. "Something dreadful will happen if I don't make it up to them," he thought. "It must be done—it must! I can't go about with this weight at my heart; it would drive me mad."

He had a small room of his own in the house in which Thrifty Miller's grinding business was transacted, and he retired to it and, locking the door, began to ruminate. He opened his old trunk in which all his worldly possessions were collected: some odd remnants of clothes worth a few pence, two or three story-books he had picked up cheap at bookstalls, and a picture of his mother; it was very much faded, but memory brought back the features distinctly. She had not been a bad mother to him; she was poor, but she had done the best she could, and he could recall, and did, many little incidents with which she was tenderly and lovingly connected.

"I give you my honest word, mother," he said aloud, as though he was replying to an accusation, "I never had an idea till now that I was doing such dreadful things, and that I was such a wicked monster."

After which, it seemed to him as if he was listening again to the last words the woman had spoken to him: "Undo what you've done in the best way you can. You can't call back the dead, but you can make it up to the living."

"Yes, I would," he said aloud, in reply to the silent voice, "if I knew how." Listlessly he took up one of the story-books

he had brought, and happened to open it on a page in which the character of a rich, avaricious money-lender and miser was depicted. Thomas Mayple read it with a kind of fascination, and never in all his after-life forgot the concluding lines: "In perfect truth, it may be said that he was a man whose office was his church, whose desk was his pulpit, whose ledger was his Bible, and whose money was his god."

The words had a peculiar fascination for him, and he repeated them over and over again: "Whose office was his church, whose desk was his pulpit, whose ledger was his Bible, and whose money was his god." He pressed his head between his hands. That was the way in which he had been passing his life. Church, pulpit, Bible, and God, all were at hand within the walls of Thrifty Miller's house, and every one of the seven days of the week was a day of unrest and ruin. It seemed to him as if he was just awaking from a horrible dream. But it was no dream that Mrs. Porter was ruined, and that her children were going about without shoes to their feet; it was no dream that Rachael Lavender's baby was starving, and that pretty Rachael's heart was filled with despair; it was no dream that Mrs. Rickaby was dead, and that her children were in the workhouse. A host of other persons rose in judgment against him, all with desolate homes and wretched futures; bad work for which he and Thrifty Miller were responsible. "Yes," he groaned, "ruined by me and Thrifty Miller; no doubt of that! He told me to do his dirty work, and I did it. I am as bad as he is, every bit as bad. It is perfectly horrible to think of, and I never *did* think of it in a proper light till now. What a monster I am—what a monster!" The voice of Thrifty Miller from the lower part of the house recalled him to his sober senses.

"Upon my word," he thought, as he descended the stairs, "it would be a mercy if somebody put an end to us both. No, it wouldn't; before an end is put to me I must undo the mischief I have been the cause of; keep that well in your mind, Tommy Mayple! It's got to be undone; I must make it up to them somehow, and then I don't care what becomes of me, for I shall be able to look my old mother in the face."

Thrifty Miller was sitting on a high stool before a desk in the small office in which Heaven knows how many snares had been laid for unsuspecting victims—snares into which they

had too readily fallen, and which had proved their destruction. His face was unusually white, and on it was portrayed an expression of mingled fear and determination.

"Is that what I pay you for?" demanded the usurer in a grating tone; "to idle the day away in your room when there's business to be done, you penniless scamp? I wonder how it is I've had the patience to keep you all these years. What's the matter with you? Your eyes are glaring out of your head as though you'd seen a ghost."

"Almost as bad—almost as bad!" murmured Thomas Mayple.

"What's almost as bad?" cried Thrifty Miller, bending forward from his stool, so that his head was within an inch of Thomas Mayple's.

"The shock I've received," replied Thomas Mayple.

"Oh, you've received a shock, have you?"

"A bad shock," murmured Thomas Mayple dreamily, "a very bad shock."

"Ah," said Thrifty Miller, "you look like it; but I give you warning——"

"Warning!" gasped Thomas Mayple.

"Not the kind of warning you are afraid of," said Thrifty Miller with an ill-natured laugh, from which it was evident he derived enjoyment. "That will come presently, sooner than you expect. What I mean is, if anything happens to you in my house, you needn't expect to be nursed in it; I don't keep a hospital. I've done quite enough for you; more than enough, indeed, for you've almost eaten me out of house and home."

"What should happen to me?"

"Why, from your appearance, I shouldn't be surprised if you fell down in a fit. I've warned you, mind—don't do it in my house! Go into the street and fall down there. If you come any of your tricks upon me, I'll take the law of you—I will, as sure as my name's Thrifty Miller!"

"You look, too, as if you'd received a shock," said Thomas Mayple, noticing the unusual paleness in his employer's face. He spoke vaguely, for he was agitated by strange thoughts. If Thrifty Miller could have seen into his clerk's mind, he would have been considerably startled and disturbed by the plan, born of remorse, which was shaping itself therein.

"That fellow, Richard Freeman," said Thrifty Miller, "has been threatening me again to-day. He swears he'll make this neighbourhood too hot to hold me, and that if I don't want my bones broken I had better clear out of it. Has he threatened you?"

"No."

"Of course not. You're the amiable one, you are, with your bright eyes and beaming face."

"Yes," groaned Thomas Mayple, "I'm the amiable one, I am!"

"Such a cheerful sort of beggar, such a pleasant, smooth-tongued sort of chap! You wouldn't hurt a worm, you wouldn't, with your soft heart and tender ways!"

"My soft heart!" groaned Thomas Mayple; "my tender ways!"

"That scamp, Richard Freeman, wouldn't speak to you as he speaks to me; wouldn't threaten you as he threatens me. I go in fear of my life through him—in fear of my life—in fear of my life."

"You said just now you'd take the law of me," said Thomas Mayple, absently; "why don't you take the law of *him*?"

Thrifty Miller gave his confidential clerk a dark look.

"You viper, you!" he cried; "you know I daren't go to law. You know if they once got me in the witness-box they'd drag up all sorts of things against me; they'd employ a lawyer, and he'd tear me to pieces. I shouldn't wonder if he dragged my books into court; and if they were examined I should be ruined. But take care—take care! I've got you in my power, Tommy Mayple; don't play any of your tricks upon me, or you may find the neighbourhood too hot for the clerk as well as for the master."

"We have made it," observed Thomas Mayple, ruefully, "too hot for the pair of us." And then he cried in a loud voice, "I'll do it!"

"Do what?" asked Thrifty Miller, with an idea that his clerk was going mad.

"I'll tell you the kind of shock I've received," said Thomas Mayple.

"Well, what is it?"

"The fact of it is," said Thomas Mayple, speaking now very slowly, "I've had a legacy left to me."

But though he spoke clearly and composedly, there was a certain wildness about him which almost ripened into conviction the suspicion entertained by Thrifty Miller of his clerk's sanity.

"A legacy, eh? That's strange."

"Very strange."

"Is it much?"

"That," replied Thomas Mayple, "I would rather keep to myself."

"Who left it to you?"

"That, also, I would rather keep to myself."

"When do you come into it?"

"I don't know."

"All right," said Thrifty Miller, "we'll talk of this another time. Come to me to-night, at nine o'clock, when you'll find I've something very particular to say to you. In the meantime, you will draw out a list of every person who owes me money, and how much. I'm going to make a change that will surprise you almost as much as the news of your legacy has surprised me. If it's true, it couldn't have happened at a better time."

CHAPTER XXXV.

MASTER AND MAN.

“Now,” said Thrifty Miller, when Thomas Mayple presented himself at nine o’clock with the list which he had been instructed to prepare, “you and I are going to have a little confidential conversation, and I am going to surprise you.”

The room in which this interview took place was Thrifty Miller’s bedroom, on the ground-floor. It was very plainly furnished; Thrifty Miller was not the man to waste his money on personal luxury. Two wooden chairs, a deal table, a common washstand, and an iron bedstead, comprised the whole of the furniture. In the corner of the room, however, was a safe, firmly fixed, and this in itself was an indication of wealth. It contained very little money; the usurer, dearly as he loved the sight and the touch of gold, would not run the risk of keeping gold or notes in the house. The treasures which the safe guarded consisted of documents signed by the poor people with whom he had dealings, which bound them hand and foot to him. The power he wielded over them was appalling.

Thomas Mayple handed him the list, and he ran his eye down it.

“You’ve left a name out,” he said, “a very particular name.”

“Whose?” inquired Thomas Mayple.

“Your own,” replied Thrifty Miller, with a malicious grin. “Why, Mayple, you owe me more than all these people put together. You are a capital hand at accounts, and it is altogether inexcusable that you should have been so forgetful.” Thomas Mayple was silent, and Thrifty Miller drew a number of documents from the papers lying on the table, and began to finger them. “But though you may be forgetful, Mayple, I am not; I can’t afford to be. Here, under my thumb, are all your IOU’s and bills—and here is a fair and complete statement of the money, with interest, you are indebted to me—all under my thumb, Mayple, all under my thumb.”

“What’s the use of them?” said Thomas Mayple. “You

know I can't pay you ; you know I haven't a shilling in the world."

"What ! When you've just come into a fat legacy !"

"Yes, yes," said Thomas Mayple awkwardly, "I forgot that. There's my legacy, of course, when I get it."

"And when you come into it, you'll settle accounts with me."

"Yes, when I come into it. You may depend upon that. But doesn't it strike you that you're rather hard on me ? Here have I been slaving for you all my life, and I'm as poor as a church mouse, while you are rolling in money—"

"Rolling in money," interposed Thrifty Miller, chuckling, "rolling in money ! What a lovely bed to roll in, Mayple !"

"Rather hard, I should say."

"Not if it's made of bank-notes, Mayple. Then think of the power it gives you !"

"Power to do what—to ruin people ?"

Thrifty Miller poked his face close to the face of his clerk.

"I've been suspecting this for some time," he snarled ; "but you had best be careful. If you turn upon me it will be the worst day's work you have ever done, and you shall live to rue it. You were speaking of the difference between you and me. Go on, Mayple—go on."

"It was only that it seems so hard you should be so rich and I so poor, and that you should talk of ruining me."

"Whose fault is it that you haven't got a penny—except your legacy ; we mustn't forget that—whose fault but your own ? Here have you been indulging all your life in luxuries, and living on the fat of the land, while I have been scraping and scraping, and living on a crust. It was the same when we were at school together, and it has been the same all through. And now, pay particular attention to what I'm going to say. How you come out of this—whether I'm hard or soft on you—will depend upon yourself and upon no one else. I'm going to give up business, Mayple ; I'm going abroad to enjoy myself ; and there's a lot of work to do before I shut up shop."

"And I'm to do it," said Thomas Mayple.

"And you're to do it," echoed Thrifty Miller, nodding his head. "It isn't safe for me to show myself in the streets—that fellow Freeman is determined to hunt me down, and people have no gratitude. They scowl at me as though they'd like to break every bone in my body. The very policemen are

against me, and I don't believe they'd raise a finger to save me if I was assaulted. Do you understand all this?"

"It isn't difficult," said Thomas Mayple; "everybody hates you."

"You viper, you!" snarled Thrifty Miller. "But put it that way if it pleases you. What does it matter, so long as I'm rich? I'll pay them out for hating me. When I leave this neighbourhood I shall put my house property into the hands of a sharp agent, and he shall show no mercy to those who don't pay their rent regularly. But there are debts owing to me which I can't leave an agent to collect. They must be collected before I go, and I must keep myself a prisoner in the house out of fear of the villain Freeman. You will have to do all the collecting. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear."

"If you bring me in good returns you will reap the benefit; if you come to me with a long face, and tell me that the people can't pay, you shall smart for it."

"I will do my best; but if they can't pay, they can't. You can't get blood out of a stone."

"You can, you dog, if you squeeze it hard enough! I haven't lived among these people for nothing—no more have you, and you know as well as I do that they wouldn't pay a penny unless they were driven to it."

"And I am to drive them to it?"

"Yes. Threaten them with anything you can think of to frighten them into settling up. Squeeze them, Mayple—squeeze them!"

"Scrape their bones," said Thomas Mayple, dreamily, thinking of the words used against him and his employer early in the day. "Fling them into a pauper's grave?"

"What do I care," snarled Thrifty Miller, "what becomes of them? There are two wise maxims, Mayple, that you have lost sight of all your life, and that I have always kept in view. 'Every man for himself,' and 'Take care of number one.' If you had borne those maxims in mind you might have been at this minute as rich as I am." He stopped here suddenly, and gazed suspiciously at his clerk. "Perhaps you are," he said.

"Perhaps I am what?" asked Thomas Mayple.

"As rich as I am."

Thomas Mayple put on a rueful expression. "I wish I was," he muttered.

"Listen one little minute," said Thrifty Miller, holding up the forefinger of his right hand. "If you flatter yourself you are deceiving me, you are mightily mistaken. Do you suppose I believe a word about your legacy?"

"You don't, eh?"

"Not a word, Mayple—not a word. It is an invention of yours, to put me off the scent. If you've got money, you've stolen it from me, and as sure as you are standing alive before me, I'll put you in gaol for it. You know me by this time, and you know I am as good as my word."

"Say as bad," suggested Thomas Mayple.

"It will be bad for you, old schoolfellow. I've not been asleep all the years you have been with me. I've watched you, Mayple; I've watched you very closely, and I know you have filched a bit here and a bit there, and that you have a secret hoard somewhere. It's mine, you dog, mine! Not a shilling of it belongs to you, and I'll make you refund it to the last farthing. That is why you have trumped up this story about the legacy."

"Give a dog a bad name, and hang him at once," said Thomas Mayple.

"You deserve to be hanged," was Thrifty Miller's rejoinder. "Robbing a good master like me, who has kept you out of the workhouse."

"Talking about the workhouse," said Thomas Mayple, who, for some reason of his own, did not appear anxious to put a stop to the unpleasant conversation, "do you know that old Mr. Meakin and his wife are there?"

"What if they are? They should have looked after themselves better; they should have thought of number one."

"Perhaps you were too sharp for them."

"Perhaps I was, perhaps I was," chuckled Thrifty Miller, rubbing his hands; "you won't find many sharper; not many, not many."

"That's true," said Thomas Mayple sententiously; "you're a match for any dozen."

"I hope so, I hope so," said Thrifty Miller, joyously. "That is why I have got on so well. Spiders and flies, Mayple—spiders and flies."

"What do you mean by that?"

"What do I mean? Why, that the world is full of them; and if you ain't sharp enough and clever enough to be a spider, you must be a fly."

"Old Meakin was a fly."

"Yes, you dog, yes."

"And Rachel Lavender was a fly."

"Yes, you dog, yes."

"And Mrs. Porter was a fly."

"What a memory you've got! Yes, all flies, all flies."

"And you were the spider that pulled them limb from limb."

"Look here!" cried Thrifty Miller; "what are you up to with your unpleasant remarks? Take care I don't pull *you* limb from limb!"

"Oh, as for me," said Thomas Mayple, "I'm not worth considering. I'm thinking of the others. What I have done I have done with my eyes open, I suppose."

"I suppose you have. You're deeper than I gave you credit for being, Mayple."

"And yet," said Thomas Mayple, "it seems that I have only just woke up from a long and ugly dream."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. I should like you to tell me, Thrifty Miller, if you knew I have been robbing you all these years, why you did not put me into gaol long ago?"

"Oh, you want to know that, do you?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Thrifty Miller, throwing himself back in his chair, "as we shall not have many more confidential conversations, and as there's nobody by to hear what I say, I will be frank with you."

"You are very good," murmured Thomas Mayple.

"Firstly, then, I don't mind confessing to you that the proofs of your dishonesty were not quite complete. You have been so very sly, Mayple; so very, very sly! That is a compliment; a very great compliment."

"Thank you. Are the proofs complete now?"

"I will take a leaf out of your book, Mayple, and reply as you replied to me when I asked you the amount of your supposed legacy, and when you come into it. As to whether my proofs are complete now, that I would rather keep to myself."

"You have other reasons for not putting me in gaol."

"You are right, and I don't mind letting you into the secret of the most important of them all. The fact is, it would have been difficult for me to obtain another clerk who could do as well as you have done the ticklish work you've to do for me. You are altogether such a jovial, cheery person, you smile so brightly, your eye is so genial, your manners are so outwardly innocent and guileless, that the people trusted in you and had confidence in you. If I were a gambler I'd make a heavy bet, and win it, that there are plenty of my debtors who would not have put money in my pocket had they not believed that when the pinch came—as it did come to most of them—you would step in and say a good word for them which would make things all right. I don't remember," said Thrifty Miller contemplatively, "that you ever *did* say a good word for them, or that you ever *did* make things right for them."

"I knew," said Thomas Mayple, with a gloomy air, "that it would have been entirely useless to try."

"Perhaps so; but I am speaking of the fact of what *did* happen, not of what did *not* happen. *Did* you ever get me to make things right for one of the foolish people—foolish is not the proper word to use; it should be dishonest—*did* you ever induce me to forego my rights and say to one of my debtors, 'You plead that you can't pay me the money you owe me; I'll make you a present of it'?"

"Not one," groaned Thomas Mayple; "not one! And my guileless manners and bright smile—heaven forgive me for repeating your words!—have brought them to ruin."

"You may express the fact in whatever disagreeable terms you choose. They owed me money, and would have robbed me of it but for you. I know that I am not a favourite in this neighbourhood, and that, as you were kind enough to remind me a little while ago, the people hate me. But take my word for it, they hate you in their secret hearts much more than they do me. I was always outspoken with them; they saw in my face what I meant; when I asked them for the money they owed me I spoke harshly to them—I admit it; I threatened them with the law, with prison, with anything that would frighten them into paying. But *you*, Mayple, *you* were always so smooth and easy in your talk; you coaxed them into paying; they could not resist your amiable ways; I dare say you made

all sorts of promises to them, and comforted them with such sayings as 'Things are sure to come right,' and 'You'll have a little bit of luck presently, you see if you don't.' What did you tell me just now—that you have just woke up from a long and ugly dream? You will find that it is the people you have been so friendly with who have just woke up from a long and ugly dream. They will make you feel it. If I am a wolf—oh, I know what they say of me!—they saw the wolf in me. I didn't put on sheep's clothing to deceive them; I didn't lead them on with smooth words and coaxing ways till they found themselves—where did you say?—oh! in the workhouse. That is just the difference between us, and I have the satisfaction of knowing that your efforts to make a saint of yourself at my expense have not met with success. How do you like all this, Mayple?"

As he had done two or three times before in the course of the day, Thomas Mayple held his head between his hands and groaned. It was not the malice of his master that affected him; it was that he could not help admitting the justice and truth of the stones flung at him.

"I deserve," he said in a low tone, "to be transported for life for what I have done."

"That you do," said Thrifty Miller cheerfully; "and there are more unlikely things than that you will get what you deserve. Now take these books and the list you have prepared up into your room, and make your arrangements for commencing to-morrow morning to get in the money that is owing to me. And don't forget the warning I've given you—as you deal by me, I will deal by you. Good-night, Mayple, and pleasant dreams to you."

As a matter of fact, Thomas Mayple's dreams were the reverse of pleasant. Now he was looking into the pauper's grave in which Mrs. Rickaby was buried, and Mrs. Rickaby's white face was raised to his reproachfully. Now he saw Rachel Lavender with a starving baby at her breast; and when he ran from her in despair, he met Mrs. Porter and her children in rags, who clamoured to him for food. Now Mr. Meakin, in charity clothes, came imploring him, with tears running down his face, to intercede with the master of the workhouse, so that he and his old wife should not be separated during the short time that remained to them on earth. Now he was flying through the

streets, followed by a mob of people screaming that he was a wolf in sheep's clothing, and that they would pull him limb from limb. He fell plump into an open grave, and they all fell on the top of him, and he was plunged in darkness. Down he sank through the earth—down, down, till a flood of light almost blinded him, and he found himself on a ship sailing for the east end of London, where a large crowd of people, more friendly now, and smiling, waited for him, and asked him in loud tones whether that was his ship that was coming home, and whether it would bring them good luck. "Yes," he cried, "it is my ship, and it is bringing you good luck." With that he woke, and lay awake the rest of the night, revolving a plan in his mind, the morality of which was decidedly objectionable. Nevertheless, without regard to consequences, he determined to carry it out. "Yes," he cried, "I will make it up to them ; and then I don't care what becomes of me."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE USE THAT THOMAS MAYPLE MADE OF HIS SHADOWY LEGACY.

WHAT subsequently transpired with respect to Thomas Mayple and the legacy which he had invented will be found explained in a letter written by Richard Freeman to Philip Raven. The events which it records caused great excitement in the neighbourhood, and Philip Raven was curious to learn the particulars, with which it appears Richard Freeman was fully acquainted. At the time the letter was written Philip was in the country, the reason for which will appear farther on. It will be sufficient here to say that his absence from London was directly associated with the interest he took in the Earnshaws, and that it was only a vital turn in their affairs, which might bring joy or despair to their hearts, that caused him to desert for a short time the scene of his labours.

“MY DEAR PHILIP,—I now set down for your study a series of circumstances in connection with certain persons well known in the neighbourhood, with which, had you not been engrossed in special anxieties of your own, you would doubtless have been familiar. The principal actors in what I insist upon calling a comedy (I can see you, when the affair is disclosed, shaking your head gravely at the title I claim for it) are: Thrifty Miller, usurer and miser, a base wretch whom I thrashed once in your presence; Thomas Mayple, his clerk; and no less a personage than Mr. Robert Pennyfold, Alderman and Magistrate of the City of London, concerning whom you and I have had some conversation, with a pretty general agreement as to his character. I need say nothing descriptively of him; you know him, and appreciate him at his proper worth. Neither is it necessary for me to describe the character of Thrifty Miller; I have already made you acquainted with the kind of man he is, and the nature of his dealings. Sufficient for me to state that he has been for years like a bad specimen of the upas-tree growing in the midst of these poor streets,

poisoning the air ; a very breeder of misery. I was determined at all hazards to drive him from the neighbourhood ; the mischief he has done is incalculable, and I was resolved he should do no more within my immediate sphere. I knew how to work upon his fears ; I do not ask you to excuse me for threatening him with personal violence if he showed his face in the streets.

“The course I pursued was unlawful, illegal. Granted. But I was ready to take the consequences. My methods are my own, and I have a stubborn way of justifying them, which satisfies me if it satisfies no one else. Wilful men like me are awkward customers for friends as well as foes.

“Thomas Mayple, whom you scarcely know except from hearsay, deserves a few words of description. He is the tool of his master, Thrifty Miller, and as unlikely a person as you can possibly imagine for such bad work. He is a simple, unambitious, credulous, easy-going fellow, brimming over with the milk of human kindness. Just the man for Thrifty Miller, a tool which he managed with great cunning. Such men as the usurer are clever—that is the worst of it. They have brain-power of a certain quality which they use to vile ends. These two men, Thrifty Miller and Thomas Mayple, were schoolfellows, and came to London to seek their fortunes. By force of cunning the one rose to wealth, while, as the consequence of a simple nature, the other remained in poverty. So behold them, master and man, the one with his coffers full of gold, ripe for the world’s worship, the other without a shilling, and guilty of an act (the principal in my ‘comedy’) which entitles him to the felon’s garb. And yet it is precisely because of this act that I have conceived a high regard for him, and intend to stand by him.

“This was the way of it. For reasons for which no doubt I am partly responsible, the fellow, Thrifty Miller, resolves to wind up his rascally business and depart from amongst us. And at this precise time Thomas Mayple’s eyes are opened to the evils perpetrated by his master, and to which he, as his master’s confidential agent, has contributed. I speak with authority, for I have sifted this affair to the bottom, and Thomas Mayple has opened his heart to me. There are brought home to him so many deplorable instances of the ruin and misery wrought by Thrifty Miller, and he is so tortured by

remorse, that he devises a nefarious plan, by which, if Thrifty Miller would only take the credit of it, some portion of the usurer's guilt (it is no less) would be atoned for. But Thrifty Miller is the last man in the world capable of such an act of grace. What does the foolish Thomas Mayple do? He gives out that he has come into a legacy, and he invites Thrifty Miller's victims to a tea-party in a large room for the occasion.

"The meeting took place the night before last; I had obtained an inkling of Thomas Mayple's proceedings, and they had so aroused my curiosity that I made up my mind to be present and see the upshot of it.

"I will give you two or three illustrations of these proceedings.

"There was a Mrs. Porter, who had been really fairly well-to-do (as I am speaking of very poor persons you know what I mean by that), with a few pounds in the Post-Office Savings Bank, and bringing up her five children respectably, till Thrifty Miller cast his evil eye upon her. The details of her ruin I leave to your imagination, as I shall do with the other illustrations I shall give you. It is a slow but sure process, commencing from the day the unsuspecting one falls into the clutches of these petty money-lenders and tallymen. Thrifty Miller sent this woman and her children starving, literally starving, upon the streets. With the remorseful and contrite fit upon him, Thomas Mayple seeks her out, feeds and clothes her and her children, and sets up a home for her—all at the cost of a very few pounds. She is already at work, and if she is allowed to go on in peace will presently re-establish herself. And she and her children are at the tea-meeting.

"I must tell you that Thomas Mayple introduced a kind of secrecy in his method of setting wrong things right. Whenever he was thanked for the benefits he was conferring, his reply was:

"Do not thank me; there is somebody else you have to thank, but I must not at present divulge his name. We will have a meeting by-and-by, and then you shall know all."

"As he went to the Mrs. Porter I have mentioned as having been ruined by Thrifty Miller, so he went to another woman, Mrs. Lavender, who three years ago was generally known as 'pretty Rachel,' and her husband, who had also been ruined by the money-lender. They were in a desperate condition, and he

rescued them. He redeemed the husband's tools and made him take the pledge; he obtained work for him; he furnished a room for them—and there they are, once more in the ranks of respectability. And *they* were at the meeting. He would not listen to thanks. 'We will have a meeting by-and-by,' he said, 'and then you shall know all.'

"There was also a Mrs. Rickaby, who had been ruined by Thrifty Miller. Mayple could not set *her* up again, for she was dead; but he took her children from the workhouse and established them in a room in which he says he will live when he leaves Thrifty Miller's service. That is his intention, and he took upon himself, poor fellow, to look after Mrs. Rickaby's children and bring them up—and *they* were at the meeting.

"Then there are a Mr. Meakin and his wife, a very old couple, who had been driven to the workhouse by Thrifty Miller. It was beyond his means to set them up for good, but he has done that which has lightened their load for them—and *they* were at the meeting.

"I could give you a dozen other illustrations of his Quixotic and very reprehensible goodness. You will presently understand why I use that singular phrase.

"Well, now, in what terms would you speak of a remorseful, good-hearted man, who in the course of a few days, did so many kind actions? You are ready, of course, to laud him, to shake hands with him, to say, 'Mr. Thomas Mayple, you are a noble fellow, and I am proud to know you.' Wait; the comedy has not progressed very far as yet.

"How he got hold of Mr. Pennyfold is a prime bit of the comedy. I think it was the other way; I think Mr. Pennyfold got hold of him. This gentleman, being in pursuit of philanthropy, ventured into our wilds, and heard something of Thomas Mayple's doings. Thereupon he pounced upon Thomas Mayple, and being informed of the contemplated tea-meeting, volunteered to preside and make a speech thereat. This sufficiently explains why he also was present in the capacity of chairman.

"For the proper understanding of all this, and of what is to follow, I must inform you that during the whole time Thomas Mayple was thus engaged, Thrifty Miller was never once seen about the streets; the fact is, he was lying concealed in his house, afraid to venture out. I had, as I intended, most effectually frightened him, and he dared not put his nose out

of doors for fear of meeting me. Had this not been the case the comedy would have taken a very different turn ; indeed, it is hardly possible it could have reached the point to which I have brought it. Thus you will perceive that I, without at all intending it, am in a large measure responsible for what occurred.

“Now, imagine the meeting. Some forty persons were present, all of whom had been plunged into the lowest depths by the nefarious doings of Thrifty Miller, and raised therefrom by the reprehensible goodness of Thomas Mayple. A cheerful expression reigned upon every face, with the exception of Thomas Mayple’s. He was grave, and when he smiled it was only by an effort. No one but I noticed his singular demeanour ; they were all too deeply engrossed in the better fortune which had so surprisingly fallen upon them. There was tea to be discussed, and they did ample justice to it.

“Mr. Pennyfold made his appearance before the meal was over, and he stimulated the poor people to renewed efforts, condescending even to assist them with his own hands. Had I not been better informed, I should have looked upon him, and not upon Thomas Mayple, as the beneficent genius of the meeting, and I have no doubt many of those present did so regard him until they were enlightened.

“While the tea-things were being cleared away Mr. Pennyfold and Thomas Mayple held a private conference in a corner of the room, and I saw Mr. Pennyfold making notes in his note-book. These notes he consulted in the course of the speech with which he regaled us.

“I am not at all sure that he viewed me with any degree of favour, but I *am* sure, if he had been better acquainted with me, that he would have visited me with his displeasure. I did not come into collision with him ; I was simply present as a spectator, by permission of Thomas Mayple, and my observation led me to expect a novel experience ; but I certainly was not prepared for a climax so startling as that which occurred.

“I pass over the animated conversation of those who had been so strangely and unexpectedly raised from the depths of despair, and their strong expressions of gratitude towards Thomas Mayple. It was useless for him to decline their thanks ; although he awkwardly declared that none were due to him

for this better turn in their fortunes, they insisted that it was he, and no other, to whom their gratitude was due.

“‘And Dick and me, Mr. Mayple,’ said Rachel Lavender, ‘will never forget you, never, as long as we live. We’ve got good cause to remember you, for we were that low down that if it had gone on much longer I should have been wicked enough to make a hole in the water to put an end to my misery.’”

“‘This little scene was taking place almost in private, out of hearing of the others. The woman was brimming over with gratitude, and she would not be denied. Her baby was in her arms, and her husband, a good-looking fellow, stood by her side.

“‘Rachel wouldn’t be satisfied,’ said Dick Lavender, ‘till she’d spoke her mind. You see, Mr. Freeman, we commenced on a wrong tack—’

“‘I did,’ interrupted Rachel; ‘*you* wasn’t to blame, Dick. I kept things from you that you ought to have known.’”

“‘Well, perhaps you did,’ said Dick; ‘but when we got married, your troubles were mine, and mine were yours, so whoever it was that was most to blame, it was a partnership that neither of us could get out of.’”

“‘You didn’t want to get out of it, Dick, did you?’ asked Rachel anxiously.

“‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘When things were so bad that they couldn’t well have got worse, I *did* think more than once that it would have been better for the pair of us if something had happened to keep us apart. I don’t think so now, not a bit of it. You see, Mr. Freeman, as I was saying, we commenced on the wrong tack, and when I was pulled down—’

“‘By me, Dick, by me,’ again interrupted the grateful and penitent woman, ‘it was all my doings.’”

“‘Let bygones be bygones, Rachel. And when I was pulled down, Mr. Freeman, I didn’t have the strength of mind to fight with all my might and main against it. I don’t say it would have made things much better, for we were in a desperate tangle, but at all events I might have done better than I did. Howsomever, thanks to Mr. Mayple, we’ve got a chance now, and we’re going to make the best of it. What Rachel wants Mr. Mayple to understand is that while there’s a breath in her body she won’t forget the good turn he’s done for us. I say so

too, and if ever I can repay him I shall be glad of the opportunity.'

"He spoke with sincerity and with true gratitude for the helping hand that had been held out to him.

"'It isn't a bad thing to have done, Mr. Freeman,' said Thomas Mayple to me privately.

"'A bad thing!' I said, the more warmly, perhaps, because of the singular tone of depreciation in which he spoke. 'It is a noble thing, and I count you my friend from this night.'

"'No, don't do that,' he said hurriedly; 'I won't let you do that. It isn't fair to yourself, for you see, Mr. Freeman, before many hours are over you might repent it.'

"'Nonsense, nonsense!' I said; 'when I look round upon the people you have made happy, I almost envy you this night.'

"'It was worth running a risk for?' he suggested.

"Without in the least understanding him, but perceiving he had something on his mind he did not wish to disclose, I replied:

"'Quite worth it.'

"'Even danger?' he asked.

"I assented. 'Even danger.'

"'Because,' he said, evidently pleased at my approval, 'when a man has been the cause of mischief, as I have been—though I give you my honest word I never seriously considered it—he should not stop at any sacrifice to undo it, and to make it up to those who have been put upon, not to say ruined, as nearly every person here has been.'

"'All's well that ends well,' I remarked.

"'Yes,' he said, nodding his head, 'but the end has not come yet. I don't care, though, whatever happens to me.'

"There was something very enigmatical in this, but I perceived that it would be useless to ask for an explanation.

"Thomas Mayple was called away, and I found Rachel Lavender again at my side; this time she was not accompanied by her husband.

"'If I could speak a word to you in private, sir,' she said, 'I should be grateful.'

"'Go on,' I said.

"'There's such a bright prospect before us,' she continued, 'that it's almost like flying in the face of Providence not to rest satisfied with what Mr. Mayple has done for us; but I am

haunted by a great fear that our happiness may be snatched away from us.'

" 'How is that to happen,' I inquired, 'unless you yourselves bring it about?'

" 'It don't rest with us, sir,' she replied. 'When we began to get into trouble we were foolish enough to sign papers which Mr. Miller brought to us. It was right, of course, that Mr. Miller should want to get as much security as he could from us for the money he said we owed him, though I'm ready to take my oath that we must have paid him, over and over again, every penny we had from him.'

" 'What was in the papers you signed?' I asked.

" 'That's where it is,' she said with a distressed look. 'I couldn't tell you what was in them any more than the dead. Sometimes Mr. Miller mumbled a lot of words while he was pretending to read the papers that we couldn't make head or tail of. Sometimes he didn't read the papers at all, but said, "As you can't pay up to-day, you must sign this." We were glad enough to put our names to anything to get rid of him and the vexation for a time; but it was upon one of those papers that we were turned out of house and home. And there's others, sir, that might be brought against us, and it troubles me dreadfully to think that they might come against us like a thunder-clap just when everything was bright.'

" 'And you want me to ask Thomas Mayple what has become of those papers?' I said.

" 'And to give them up to us, sir,' she added anxiously, 'for with such a stone hanging over our heads I shouldn't know a moment's peace. There were two papers, sir, that I signed without Dick's knowing. What would he say if they were brought up one of these fine days? He'd never trust me again—and serve me right. I've only thought of it this last minute or two, and it worries me dreadfully. Do you think you can do anything for us, sir?'

" 'I don't know,' I replied gravely; 'it is a difficult matter, but I will promise, at least, to speak to Thomas Mayple about the papers before the night is out. I am not a lawyer, but my impression is, if you are ignorant of what you signed, and if it was not properly explained to you—'

"She interrupted me warmly.

" 'It never was, sir; I will take my oath of it.'

“‘In that case,’ I said, ‘it is my opinion that the documents are of very small value in law. If people had the courage to fight some of these usurers, and expose them in the courts, they would not grow so fat upon ruin.’

“‘There’s something more than courage required,’ she said shrewdly; ‘the law is such a tangle that once a poor man gets into it, there’s no getting out of it till the very clothes are stripped off his back.’

“A stop was put to our conversation by a loud rapping at the end of the room. The rapping proceeded from Mr. Pennyfold, who was standing before a desk, about to make his speech.

“He commenced by saying that he was glad to welcome them there that night, which would have given a stranger the impression that they were there by his invitation. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to see around him a representative gathering such as this, and it was a satisfaction to him to know that few public men understood their failings and virtues as well as he did.

“‘I have studied the humbler classes,’ he said, ‘from my boyhood, and have never failed to instil into them those moral precepts, the practice of which renders them not only a necessary but a worthy portion of the great empire, ruled by a sovereign it is my happiness to serve. It is not, however, to dilate upon general laws that I have consented to address you. This meeting is a personal one—personal to you, and in a strange way, which I will presently explain, personal also to me. I understand that most, if not all, of those I see before me have laboured under misfortune, which has been beneficently alleviated. Now, whom have you to thank for this better condition of affairs? I may take some credit to myself for having, early in life, had an opportunity of observing the seeds of benevolence implanted in two lads who were attending a humble school in Gravesend. These two lads, who now are men, were Thrifty Miller and Thomas Mayple. In the exercise of that philanthropy which I hope is the distinguishing characteristic of my career, I was in the habit of giving treats, in the shape of holiday picnics, to the poor people of Kent, and it was in this manner I made the acquaintance of the lads, Thrifty Miller and Thomas Mayple. I saw that they were destined to rise by the exercise of their own efforts and by the

excellence of their moral principles ; and what little I could do to foster those principles in their breasts, I did. Therefore it is' (and upon my word, my dear Philip, at this point the shirt-front of the orator swelled with pride) 'that I may take some credit to myself for the good fortune that has befallen you ; and I congratulate myself upon being the first to discover the germs of benevolence which lay hidden in the breasts of my two excellent friends, Mayple and Miller. I will not engage your time and attention by dilating upon this agreeable theme, but will proceed at once to the immediate object of my address. I must premise, however, that I have not yet made the personal acquaintance of Mr. Thrifty Miller as a man. This is a pleasure to come. Thomas Mayple I know, and I am delighted that my prognostications of him have been so agreeably verified. He has placed in my hands certain documents with which I shall presently deal, and he has empowered me to make a disclosure, to which I invite your attention. The fortunate change in your circumstances has cost money—how much I cannot exactly say, but certainly a not inconsiderable sum. Now, the question is, whose money is it that has been so benevolently employed ? I will tell you. It is not Thomas Mayple's money, as some of you supposed. It is Thrifty Miller's money, and it is Thrifty Miller whom you have primarily to thank for having lifted you out of misfortune. Thomas Mayple is but an instrument. Thrifty Miller is your principal and direct benefactor.'

"We all stared at each other upon hearing this extraordinary announcement, and at first no person in the room was more amazed than I. My state of wonderment lasted for but a few moments. My common-sense, my reason, rejected it. Much stronger evidence than Mr. Pennyfold's words, even backed as they were by Thomas Mayple, was needed to convince me that a black nature like Thrifty Miller's could so suddenly be made white.

"'My duty,' continued Mr. Pennyfold, 'does not end here. Doubtless when I sit down some of you will give fit expression to the feelings of gratitude which animate you, gratitude which, I venture to say, will be considerably enhanced *before* I sit down. In the course of your difficulties you have, at various times, given security in the shape of signed documents for money which you have borrowed from my estimable friend, Thrifty Miller. The whole of these documents I hold now in my hands.'

“He produced them; they were neatly folded in lengths, and on the back of each was written the name of the debtor and the nature of the security. At a moderate computation there must have been a hundred of them. I glanced at Rachel Lavender; she was pale with excitement. Bearing in mind what she had said to me, I moved close to the table, and addressing Mr. Pennyfold, asked to be allowed to glance at the papers. He gazed at me in displeasure, whereupon I quickly added that I was sure my request was one which was agreeable to those present. A number of voices cried out that it was agreeable; and Thomas Mayple, upon being questioned by Mr. Pennyfold, said that he had no objection. Upon this, without further parley, I took the papers, and rapidly turned them over. Those signed by Rachel Lavender and her husband were placed together, and I did not doubt that all their liabilities, whether legal or illegal, were there represented. I returned the papers to Mr. Pennyfold, thanked him, and waited in some anxiety for the next move in these singular proceedings.

“Mr. Pennyfold resumed. ‘I will make no comment,’ he said, ‘upon this irregular interruption on the part of one with whose name I am unacquainted, but will without delay finish what I have to say, and do what I have undertaken to do. It is not the intention of Mr. Thrifty Miller to take away with one hand what he gives you with the other. He completes the benefits he has showered upon you by releasing you, once and for all, from every obligation towards him. I am empowered by him, through our excellent friend, Thomas Mayple—*my* friend, I would have you know, as well as yours—to destroy these securities in your sight—in point of fact, to burn them.’

“Mr. Pennyfold was obliged to pause here, the cheers which rose in the room rendering it impossible for him to continue for a little while. I had moved back to my original position near Rachel Lavender, and she whispered to me:

“‘Are ours there?’

“‘Yes,’ I replied; ‘every one, I believe.’

“She fixed her eyes upon the papers in Mr. Pennyfold’s hands, as though he held her salvation in his grasp. When silence was restored, Mr. Pennyfold continued his oration.

“‘Your cheers are very gratifying to me, and are an assurance that in this Quixotic proceeding—for I admit it is Quixotic and unusual—lies an act of very great goodness. It is an act

which I myself would perform were I in Mr. Thrifty Miller's enviable position, and I am happy at the opportunity of expressing my full approval of it. I am informed that Mr. Miller himself would have been present if he were not seriously unwell, which you will all be sorry to hear. I venture to dive into the depths of his benevolent heart, so that you may thoroughly understand his reasons for this crowning charity. As his representative I take upon myself the responsibility and the reward of setting you free. Life is short—and Mr. Thrifty Miller is seriously indisposed. Let us hope that he will recover, and that he will soon be restored to health. But it may unhappily be otherwise, and his intention is not to leave you in the power of chance. Thus, then, in his name and my own, I complete his benevolent intentions, and I am more than happy that it is in my power to shed a blessing upon my humble fellow-creatures.'

"There were two candles on the desk, and behind Mr. Pennyfold a fire. With benignant smiles Mr. Pennyfold first set light to the documents, two or three at a time, and threw them into the fire, where they were slowly consumed. He was watched with breathless anxiety by those present, and when the strange sacrifice was completed and the last of the documents were blazing in the fire, he held out his hand to Thomas Mayple, and said, in a loud tone :

" 'It gives me the greatest pleasure, as a magistrate, to be the principal actor in this friendly conspiracy—'

"While Rachel Lavender threw her arms round her husband's neck, and cried :

" 'God bless him—God bless him !'

"It was while she was blessing Thrifty Miller that a sudden commotion took place at the other end of the room. The door was thrown open, and Thrifty Miller himself rushed into the room. No sooner did he make his appearance than he was hailed with blessings and thanks by those from whose lives a terrible weight had just been lifted. They patted him on the shoulders, they called down countless blessings on his head, they shook his hands against his will, and so surrounded him that it was with difficulty he forced his way to the fireplace, before which Mr. Pennyfold, with his hand thrust under his coat-tails, was comfortably warming himself.

"Aware, from the exclamations of the grateful people, that it

was Thrifty Miller who had so abruptly presented himself, Mr. Pennyfold removed his hands from his coat-tails, and seized those of the benefactor.

“‘I am proud to renew our acquaintance,’ said Mr. Pennyfold, working Thrifty Miller’s arms up and down like a double-handled pump. ‘Very, very proud. You are very wealthy, I am told. Heaven bless you! I knew you would rise in the world. You remember my wife. She will be delighted to see you—delighted! And my children. *They* will be delighted to see you—delighted!’

“By the time he had got thus far, Thrifty Miller succeeded in the frantic endeavours he had made to pluck his hands away.

“‘Who the devil are you?’ he gasped, glaring at Mr. Pennyfold.

“Mr. Pennyfold fell back aghast, but in a moment recovered his self-possession. ‘My dear sir,’ he said blandly, ‘you should not have ventured out, indeed you should not. When a man is suffering from fever—’

“But he was cut short by the fierce inquiry, made for the second time, ‘Who the devil are you?’

“‘Delirium,’ observed Mr. Pennyfold feebly, addressing those who happened to be nearest to him; ‘it is best to humour him. My dear sir, my very dear sir, I am Mr. Pennyfold.’

“‘Oh!’ sneered Thrifty Miller, ‘Pennyfold! The cheap philanthropist!’

“It was a vital stab, and Mr. Pennyfold, drawing himself up, said, in his most stately manner:

“‘I will leave you till you have recovered from your fever.’

“‘No, you don’t,’ cried Thrifty Miller, laying violent hands upon him, ‘till you tell me what all this means. Where are my papers—my securities?’

“‘Papers, securities!’ gasped Mr. Pennyfold. ‘There, in the fire!’

“With a wild shriek Thrifty Miller fell upon his knees before the fireplace, and scattering the dust and ashes in all directions, realised what had taken place. I also by this time had an understanding of the affair, derived not only from the paroxysms indulged in by Thrifty Miller, but from the face of Thomas Mayple.

“Perhaps you can guess that Thomas Mayple was the culprit, and that he alone was responsible for what had taken place.

It was really so. Overcome by remorse at the misery he, as the instrument of Thrifty Miller, had inflicted, he had conceived the idea of making his master, to some extent, atone for it.

"The statement made to the meeting by Mr. Pennyfold that it was Thrifty Miller's money which had set the poor people on their legs, was strictly accurate; but Thrifty Miller was unconscious of the good he was doing, and it was only when he discovered that he had been robbed, and that the paper securities of the poor people he had ruined had been abstracted from his safe, that he became aware of the extent of his loss. Rushing from his house, he heard of the meeting that was being held, and suddenly made his appearance thereat.

"Of course it broke up in confusion; Mr. Pennyfold disappeared most mysteriously, considerably disturbed at the part he had taken in these nefariously benevolent proceedings, and perplexed, no doubt, as to how far he was responsible for them. I know that this is the case, for I have had a private interview with him to-day, and am confident, though he attempted to throw dust in my eyes, that he dreads an exposure. I may as well frankly admit at once that I have taken this matter in hand, and intend to see it through, and it is because of this attitude that I asked for an interview with Mr. Pennyfold. I put the matter very plainly to him, and I succeeded in making him understand that it would be official death to him if the affair is brought before the public. He is a candidate for Parliament at the forthcoming General Election, and an exposure would infallibly ruin his chances, if he has any (which I devoutly hope not) in that direction. He did not like me or my opinions, but he knows where his self-interest lies, and he dreads ridicule. He has consented to a pecuniary sacrifice, in order that the matter may be hushed up.

"I did not have so easy a task with Thrifty Miller. At first he refused to see me, but I sent in word that I would wait all day rather than miss him, and that, if he knew what was good for himself, he would open up communications with me with as little delay as possible. He was frantic, furious, but I succeeded in calming him down. I made him understand that if he prosecuted Thomas Mayple I would engage the ablest and severest lawyers in London for the defence, and that in open court I would have the whole of his villainous

and usurious career laid bare. Every person he had ruined should be brought against him; his books should be subjected to the most rigorous examination; he should be made to explain certain delicate transactions which might imperil his own safety. The matter is not yet completely arranged, but it will be, and Thomas Mayple, who is quite ready to pay the penalty of his offence, will escape free. He is not only ready to pay the penalty, he is almost desirous that he should be punished.

“‘I am an abominable wretch,’ he said to me, ‘and I don’t deserve to live.’

“He finds comfort in the reflection that the good he has done cannot be undone. His mental condition is most curious—in my experience, unique.

“I would not have you suppose that I am glad to find an excuse for wrong-doing, and that I acquit Thomas Mayple from blame. He has undoubtedly acted wrongly; but there is a spice of such rough justice in his method that I cannot help considering this particular case on its own singular grounds, and quite apart from general principles. So far as honesty is concerned, I place the most implicit faith in him, and I would trust him as thoroughly and with as much confidence as I would trust you. And if you think this is paying you a compliment, you are mistaken. I must now bring my long letter to a close.

“With faithful regard, I am,

“Truly yours,

“RICHARD FREEMAN.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

EDWIN BOUSFIELD PAYS PHILIP RAVEN A VISIT.

It was previous to the occurrences narrated in Richard Freeman's letter that Philip Raven received an unexpected visit from the private detective in his employ. Mr. Bousfield was cool and collected, but it was evident that he had something of importance to communicate, and that he had come upon serious business.

"Ah," said Philip Raven, "at last ! I have been expecting you every hour."

"Of course you have," said the detective ; "but I had the best of reasons for not coming. I'm not going to do anything to spoil my own game when I've got a desperate sharp fellow in my own line trying to spoil it for me."

Philip Raven stared at this remark, and asked the detective whether he would not sit down.

"I'd rather stand," was the reply. "I think better when I stand, and better still when I walk about. So if you'll excuse me, I'll take the liberty of doing here what I do at home ;" and he commenced to pace backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, measuring his steps as it seemed, but his mind intent upon his errand. "My wife tells me I am like a caged tiger, walking up and down the room as I'm doing now. Four steps this way, and four steps that, four steps this way again, and four steps that, for all the world like a bit of machinery. It ain't fair to the carpets, I'll admit ; but as I can't think sitting down and can't think standing still, it's got to be done. But I mustn't ramble ; there's important work on hand which won't admit of delay. Give me your best attention, sir, and ask as few questions as you can, to save time."

"Have you made any discoveries?" asked Philip Raven eagerly.

"That's a quick commencement," said the detective, smiling ; "and to satisfy you I will say yes. I *have* made discoveries, and some of them so astonishing as to prove that luck

is on our side. I believe in luck ; there's lucky men and unlucky men ; lucky houses and unlucky houses ; lucky sides of streets and unlucky sides. I wouldn't put my left boot on first when I dress myself of a morning for anything, in reason, you could offer me, especially when I've got a job on hand as important as this one. Superstition, you will say. All right, call it superstition ; but as sure as I do it, so sure will something unlucky happen to me before the day is out. Now, sir, don't put leading questions to me. What I've got to tell had best be told my way ; and what's got to be done—for there's work before you, sir, as well as before me, if I'm not mistaken—must be done my way."

"It shall be," said Philip Raven ; "but do not keep me long in suspense ; I am all impatience to hear what you have to impart."

"I know that, sir ; but you must bide my time. If I'm not mistaken, you were writing at that table by the window before I entered this room."

"Yes, I was."

"And sitting there you could see pretty well everything that was going on in the street."

"Yes."

"You looked out sometimes ?"

"Yes, in a casual way."

"And as you could see people on the opposite side of the road, it isn't unreasonable to suppose that people who happen to be there could see you."

"Yes, if they wanted to."

"Exactly. If they wanted to. Now, do you think you could sit at the table there as you've been doing this last hour perhaps, and pretend to write, bending your head down sometimes, as would be natural, and raising it sometimes, as would be natural too, as though you were thinking of the next thing to put on the paper and the best way to express it ?"

"Yes," replied Philip Raven, in wonder. "There is nothing difficult in that."

"Then do it, sir," said the detective, "and do it natural. Wait a minute ; don't be in a hurry. Your back will be towards me ; that is what I want. Any person on the opposite side of the road seeing you sitting at that window with your face to it would naturally suppose you were alone in the room."

"Of course he would."

"Because, if you had a visitor, you would turn your face to him out of politeness, and not your back. Now, if you will just do as I have asked you, and cast your eyes casually into the street, you will see a man dressed in a dark brown suit, with a black felt hat on his head, and a pretty heavy stick in his hand. When you speak to me, bend your head down to the table as if you were writing; then the man who is watching you will not suspect anything."

"I see the man," said Philip Raven, following out the instructions. "What is he watching me for?"

"It's too long a story to tell in full, sir, and I'll make as short work of it as I can. Fifteen years ago, when this Featherstone tragedy took place, there was an officer in the force who took it into his head to be jealous of me, and who had an idea that he could beat me at the game of hide-and-seek. There was a little private love-affair mixed up with it; we were both of us after the same young woman, and she preferred me to him. It was not only a professional but a personal rivalry, and it riled him that I generally got ahead of him. When the Featherstone affair was put into my hands he talked pretty loudly about my being sure to make a mess of it; and I suppose I did, for, as you know, it came to nothing. Well, that riled me, and we had some words over it. There were a lot of us together one night at a harmony meeting, which wasn't at all harmonious, and the upshot was that the fellow declared if he had had the management of the Featherstone affair it wouldn't be the mystery it was. He went further, and said that we hadn't heard the last of it yet, and that he was open to make a bet that if it ever was brought to light, he was the man who would do it, and not me. We were both of us pretty hot, and I took the bet. It was a five-pound note, and I remember that a lot of us put it down in writing. Now, sir, this little difference of opinion slipped my mind as time went by, and I thought no more of it. I left the force, and started business on my own account; so did he. When I took up this affair for you a few days ago, I didn't give him a thought. But it seems he didn't forget the bet if I did, and I have reason to know now that he never forgave me for winning the woman he wanted to marry. Would you believe it, sir? He has got hold of this affair again, and he is keeping a watch, not only

upon you and upon Paul Cumberland, but, hang it ! upon me as well. It has stirred me up a bit, and my pride being touched, I'll let him know that Edwin Bousfield don't intend to be beat."

"I remember now," said Philip Raven, thoughtfully, "that my suspicions that I was being watched were aroused a few nights since. I suppose you have been followed here?"

"I have not," said the detective, "or I shouldn't be talking to you at this moment. I managed—never mind how—to give my man the slip, and the one outside who has his eye on you is a new man who has no knowledge of me. That's so far fortunate, and paves the way for a move I'm going to make. But before I open it out to you, I have something to say which will considerably astonish you, and will gratify you as well, if I am not mistaken in certain ideas. May I ask you how Mrs. Earnshaw is? I haven't been near her."

"She is as well," replied Philip Raven, somewhat shaken by the inquiry, which seemed to forbode trouble to those in whom he was so deeply interested, "as she can expect to be under her great affliction of blindness."

"Poor lady! And the daughter, sir, Miss Philippa, is she well?"

"Yes."

"And the young man, and the grandfather?"

"They are well."

"Good. I am not far out, am I, in believing that you are ready to sacrifice something for them?"

"You are not. I am ready and anxious to do anything—to the uttermost extent of my power—to serve them."

"Good again. And now for what I've got to tell you. It's nothing short of miraculous. I'll say as little as possible as to Warren Earnshaw's innocence or guilt with respect to Michael Featherstone's death. I believed him guilty; you believe him innocent, and I'm open to admit that I'm veering round to your opinion."

"It is a good hearing."

"Are you acquainted with the particulars of a bank robbery in which old Mr. Earnshaw was implicated? It occurred years before the tragedy of Featherstone."

"I am not; I never heard of it. Indeed, until within the last few weeks, I never saw old Mr. Earnshaw. When I was a

lad, at school in Cobham, I made the friendship of Warren Earnshaw, and he won my love. I gathered from certain observations and from his manner that some great trouble had fallen upon him, but I was ignorant of its nature."

"Sufficient, then, to say that it was the ruin of the Earnshaw family. It never came before the public, for the bank which old Mr. Earnshaw served, and in which he held a very high position, was desirous to hush it up, and the loss was submitted to in silence, so far as the law was concerned. But old Mr. Earnshaw, who was a fairly well-to-do gentleman, and whose character had hitherto been unimpeachable, was dismissed from the bank, a disgraced man. The exact sum the bank lost was four thousand pounds in notes and fifty pounds in gold."

Philip Raven started, remembering that that was the exact sum mentioned by James Whitelock when he and Paul Cumberland stood in the rooms once occupied by Michael Featherstone in Featherstone Buildings.

"A customer of the bank," continued the detective, "had embezzled the amount, and old Mr. Earnshaw was sent after him to recover it. He did recover it, in Chatham, and wrote to the bank to that effect. But when he presented himself before the directors he told them a wild story of having met with an accident on a short cut between Chatham and Rochester, which deprived him of his senses, and that when he had recovered consciousness he found that the four thousand pounds in bank-notes and the fifty pounds in gold had been abstracted from his breast-pocket. They refused to believe him; and what told against him was that Michael Featherstone, who was in his employ at that time, gave evidence against him to the directors, and produced some sort of circumstantial proof that his master had appropriated the money to extricate himself from a private difficulty. Do you begin to see your way, sir, out of this tangle?"

"But dimly," replied Philip Raven, "if at all. What you are relating is new and strange to me."

"The strangest part is to come—and I don't mind stopping for a moment to declare that even up to the point to which I have brought it, though the case is a long way from complete, it beats everything that has ever come within my experience. The old gentleman's story was true; he *was* robbed of the

money in the manner he stated. And the man who robbed him was James Whitelock. And what is more, Michael Featherstone knew it, and in his turn robbed Whitelock of the whole sum, with the exception of the fifty sovereigns in gold. James Whitelock, when he got possession of the money, was frightened; he was in trouble for a criminal matter for which he had suffered imprisonment, and he was under police surveillance, obliged to report himself from time to time. So what does he do—knowing that if any considerable sum of money was found in his possession he would almost to a certainty be convicted and sent across the seas—what does he do but bury the four thousand pounds in notes in Cobham Woods, resolving to leave them there till the time arrived when the police had no longer any authority over him. I will save you the trouble of asking me how I have learned all these particulars by telling you that, with a wonderful piece of evidence in my hands, I have forced a confession from Whitelock himself, and have got it down in black and white, properly witnessed, so that the name of Earnshaw can be cleared at any moment from that stigma, at all events. The bank is one of the greatest and most flourishing in England, and I don't doubt, when the facts are put before them, that the directors will, for their own sakes, make some kind of compensation to Mrs. Earnshaw and their old and faithful servant for the cruel wrong they inflicted upon him."

"You have done well," said Philip Raven warmly.

"I shall do better," said the detective in a confident tone, "by bringing the whole of this matter to the end you wish it brought to. You have not yet heard the strangest part of the affair. Some months after Whitelock buried the money, he met with an accident in the docks, which laid him on his back—on his deathbed, he thought—and then it was that Michael Featherstone and he came together. He confided to Featherstone the secret of the buried treasure, and Featherstone put it down in writing; and with this document in his possession he goes to Cobham Woods, digs up the four thousand pounds in bank-notes, and sticks to them. He doesn't tell Whitelock this; he denies that he has ever been to Cobham Woods or that he has ever searched for the treasure at all, asking Whitelock how could he suppose he was such a fool as to believe in the absurd story? What does Whitelock do, upon being told

by Featherstone that he had never been to Cobham Woods, but go there himself when he's well—for he gets better of his accident—and search for the treasure. It is gone, of course, and Whitelock comes back and has a scene with Featherstone, who threatens to set the police on him if he isn't quiet. This threat is a mortal terror to Whitelock, who has the sense to see that by going to the police he would convict himself. He is obliged, therefore, to hold his tongue, and when Featherstone, out of pretended pity for him, but really for the purpose of keeping an eye upon him, offers to take him into his service, he accepts, and from that day till the day of Featherstone's death becomes his slave. You are about to say something, sir."

"I was about to ask," said Philip Raven, "whether it is not likely that this wretched man, from a motive of revenge, did the deed of which Warren Earnshaw was suspected?"

"It is likely," replied the detective; "but it is not so. Whitelock accounted for his time on the night of the murder. I don't say, if the story I am telling you now had been known at the time of the murder, that Whitelock wouldn't have found it more difficult to clear himself than he did. But no one but he and Featherstone knew the rights about the money which the bank believed old Mr. Earnshaw had appropriated. So there was nothing to catch hold of to fasten the suspicion upon Whitelock."

"Could not the notes be traced?"

"The numbers were not known. That was a strong point against old Earnshaw. The bank directors, when they examined him, asked him whether he had not taken the numbers before he set out on his journey back to London with the money in his pocket, and he said no, he did not think it necessary. Therefore Featherstone had only to exercise ordinary caution in getting rid of the notes: he was quite equal to a task so easy. So far, the story is plain sailing; but now comes that part of it which is nothing less than wonderful. Featherstone told Whitelock that he had never been to Cobham Woods, and had never searched for the treasure. You don't forget my mention of a document written by Featherstone at Whitelock's dictation, in which the secret of the robbery and the exact spot in which the treasure was buried were all set down in plain words."

"No," said Philip Raven, following the detective's words with eager attention.

"Whitelock, when he was in Featherstone's service, asked for that document, and Featherstone said that he had burnt it. If he had burnt it there would have been an end of it, and I shouldn't be telling you this story. But it happens that the document, which we may very properly call Whitelock's Confession, was not burnt. Keep still, sir; remember that there's a spy outside watching every movement you make. I will pay you the compliment of saying that you've behaved very well up to now, and that you haven't given him cause to suspect that you have a visitor in the room. You will observe that I keep at the end of it, so that it is impossible for me to be seen. If Featherstone went to Cobham—which he says he didn't—he took that Confession with him. What will you say when I tell you that in my pocket I have the proof that he *did* go to Cobham, and that he *did* take the Confession with him? What will you say when I tell you that the proof is nothing less than the Confession itself?"

"What *can* I say," replied Philip Raven, "except to express my admiration of your marvellous skill, and to express, also, the hope that, as you have cleared old Mr. Earnshaw of the stigma of the robbery, so you will be able to clear the name of Warren Earnshaw from the stigma of a fouler crime—of which he is as innocent as his father was."

"I don't despair of doing it, sir. I introduce to you now, not in flesh and blood, but as a strange and important actor in the story, an old sailor with a wooden leg, Peter Lamb, lodging in this neighbourhood with a monkey he calls Barbery. You may know something of him; but it may surprise you to know that he was a Cobham lad, like yourself."

"I have never thought of it before," said Philip Raven, "but it comes to my remembrance now that, when I was very young, my parents spoke sometimes of a Mrs. Lamb, who lived and died in the village, and whose son ran away and went to sea. Is it possible that this can be Peter Lamb?"

"It is more than possible; it is true. He is the same, and no other. Perhaps you will be able to recall the year in which Warren Earnshaw went to Cobham, and played the part of schoolmaster there?"

"Yes, there is no difficulty. I have all my life kept a

private diary, in which the principal events of my life are recorded."

"Dangerous things, diaries," observed the detective dryly. "Not to-day, but by-an-by I may have to ask you for the date. It was during that time that Michael Featherstone went to Cobham, and it was while he was in Cobham that Peter Lamb, having been at sea a dozen years and more, returned to pay a visit to his old mother—to find that she was dead and buried. He remembers the date well, for he was only ashore three weeks, and it was on the day he was in Cobham that Michael Featherstone was also there."

"Did they meet, and did they know each other?" asked Philip Raven with a preoccupied air.

"They neither met nor knew each other; but if Michael Featherstone was alive now, and was accused of a crime the proof of which depended upon the circumstance that he and Peter Lamb were in the village on the same day, though it is twenty years ago, the evidence I can produce would convict him. Your pardon, sir; I can generally see when a man has something on his mind, and I can see that you have something on yours, concerning, perhaps, the very circumstance we are speaking of."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL.

"I AM recalling," said Philip Raven, "a trifling incident which occurred in all probability at the very time Peter Lamb was passing through the village."

"That's right, sir. Everything seems to be turning in my favour. Be as exact as you can. You have no idea how much depends upon trifles, as you call them."

"My memory is fortunately retentive, and I pledge myself to the faithfulness of detail. Warren Earnshaw and I were standing at the door of the school-house, conversing. I well remember the conversation. He told me then that he was oppressed by a serious trouble which rendered him fretful and impatient. I remember, too, while I was speaking somewhat selfishly of myself, and of my hopes in the future, that he made the remark, 'Who knows what may happen in the years to come?' Yes, yes; it comes back to me most wonderfully, almost every word of our conversation."

"The trouble that Warren Earnshaw spoke of," said the detective, "was the robbery of the money which brought ruin upon his father. Can you remember any other words bearing upon it? Never mind if they tell for him or against him. Look upon me as the man with a puzzle before him, which he's trying to put together in the interest of your friends, and some pieces of which are missing."

"He told me," said Philip Raven in a low tone, "that it was likely in the future I should win love and respect, and that I should be more fortunate than he."

"Ah, the trouble was weighing heavily upon him! Anything more, sir?"

"It was while we were standing at the door of the school-house that a man passed us, a stranger in the village, and that I made the remark that he was a sailor. Upon which Warren Earnshaw, who had also observed the stranger, said that some trouble seemed to have fallen upon him, and that there were tears in his eyes."

"He must have just heard of his mother's death. Anything more?"

"Nothing, I think, bearing upon Peter Lamb. Perhaps it is as well to mention that Mrs. Earnshaw told me quite lately that she knew Cobham well."

"Was there, most likely, at the very time we're speaking of. Why, of course," said the detective, with a little laugh of pardonable vanity at his own shrewdness, "she *was* there at the time. That was what took Warren Earnshaw to Cobham, to play the part of schoolmaster, so that he might be near his sweetheart. The puzzle is in a fair way of being satisfactorily put together. I take it, sir, though we have barely mentioned Paul Cumberland's name"—and here the detective gave Philip Raver a shrewd look—"that we have both borne him in mind through all our conversation."

"Yes."

"So, when I find out, as I do within four-and-twenty hours after I accepted the commission you gave me, that Paul Cumberland and Peter Lamb are upon intimate terms, I naturally want to know the reason why. And when I *want* to know, sir, I generally *get* to know. So I strike up an intimacy with Peter Lamb, and learn a lot about Paul Cumberland, which draws my pity to him."

"Peter Lamb speaks well of him?"

"As well as one man can speak of another; gives him the very best of characters. We get very intimate together, Peter Lamb and me. He is as simple as a baby, and it don't need a great deal of cunning on my part to draw him out and make him like me. He shows me his curiosities, and regularly lays himself open to me; and all the while this is going on I'm pumping him about Paul Cumberland, little dreaming what is to come of it. Three days ago we were sitting together in his room over a glass of grog. His monkey is there, and if you'll believe me, sir, that animal is as fond of rum as any Christian. On the table lies a little oilskin bag, and in a joking sort of way I ask Peter Lamb whether there are any curios in *that*, and I made the remark that it seems pretty well worn. He grows serious at this, and answers that he has worn the bag near his heart for many a long year. 'Then there must be something very precious in it,' I say. 'Yes,' he answers, 'something *very* precious.' With that he draws the bag close

to him, and opens it, and takes out—what do you think? Gold or diamonds? Not a bit of it; he takes out a paper packet which he spreads open before him. It contains, he says, a little earth from his mother's grave. Well sir, I was inclined all through to like the simple old fellow, but that touch of nature makes me like him more, and I bend my head down to look at the earth, out of sympathy, sir, when I'm struck dumb by some words in writing that I see on the paper in which it has been wrapped. The paper is old enough, in all conscience—quite yellow, and coming to pieces at the folds; and the writing is old enough, faded, and not over-distinct. But distinct enough for me to see the names of James Whitelock and Michael Featherstone. You may guess how that fired me up, and I didn't rest till I got the secret of the paper out of the old sailor. On the day he returned to Cobham and found that his mother was dead, he went to the churchyard, and sat on the ground by her grave. Then, before he left the village for ever, the fancy came upon him to take away with him a little of the earth from his mother's grave, and a few of the wild flowers that were growing there. He had no paper about him to wrap these memorials in, and looking around he sees a piece fluttering from a tree into which it had been blown by the wind from the village. Without a thought of what kind of fate was hanging to this simple piece of paper, he picks it up, puts the earth and the wild flowers in it, tucks it into his oilskin bag, and bids good-bye to his mother's grave, and to the village in which he was born. Now, sir, this paper, which so providentially fell into Peter Lamb's possession, and which he has worn round his neck in his oilskin bag, is nothing less than the Confession of the robbery which Michael Featherstone took down, in his own handwriting, from James Whitelock's lips. A hard nut for the famous bank to crack."

"Indeed it is," said Philip Raven, who had great difficulty in keeping still during this disclosure. "Surely the rest will follow."

"I have every confidence it will. You may depend that I didn't leave that precious piece of paper with Peter Lamb. I took the liberty of begging the loan of it, without enlightening him more than was necessary. It is always best to tell too little rather than too much; keep the game in your own hands if you can. That is my way, and there was no call for making

Peter Lamb as wise as myself. As I have said, the paper was pretty well worn, and the writing pretty well faded ; but I have not learned my business for nothing, and, with the aid of an expert, who is a dab at that kind of thing, we restored not only the original words in the Confession, but a great many that were missing ; and we made the Confession complete. Here is the document in its restored state, and I venture to say that a neater job never was done. You can come to me from your seat by the window to examine it. The man who has his eye on you outside will not run away."

Philip Raven rose and examined the Confession, which he read carefully ; then, at the desire of the detective, resumed his seat.

"Lots of points escape you, sir," continued the detective. "For instance, you don't ask how it is that I know this is in the handwriting of Michael Featherstone."

"It did not occur to me," said Philip Raven.

"Of course not. That's just the difference between a man who is trained to my line of business and a man who isn't. Important points that stand for evidence don't occur to outsiders ; but we should be nice bunglers if we allowed them to escape us. Well, sir, it was easy enough for me to get hold of some of Michael Featherstone's handwriting, and I compared it with the writing in the Confession. There isn't a doubt about it ; the writing is the same. Now, what does this prove ? That Michael Featherstone was in Cobham on the very day Peter Lamb was there, and that he went there for the purpose of digging up the treasure. By some accident or other he must have lost the Confession while he was in the village. I thought it worth my while to go to Cobham, to see if I could ferret out any evidence of this."

"Admirable !" exclaimed Philip Raven.

"Thank you, sir," said the detective jocosely. "The smallest favours gratefully received. Down I went to the village, followed by the man who was sent to shadow me. Where do I commence my inquiries ? As luck would have it, at the exact place. A small village, Cobham ; inhabitants, less than a thousand. The same now as it was forty years ago. The number of notable people limited, one of the celebrities being the landlord of the principal inn. He is the landlord to-day, as he was twenty years ago. A shrewd, liberal-minded,

pleasant fellow, fond of a chat, and blessed, fortunately, with a retentive memory, like yours, sir. To oblige me—being properly led, you may be sure, by your humble servant—he carries his retentive memory back to the time when Michael Featherstone, according to my reckoning, must have visited Cobham ; and he is assisted by recalling the return home of Peter Lamb. It happened that after the sailor passed out of the village there was a deal of talk about him ; he had made himself known to an old sweetheart of his, who had married another, as sweetheart's often do, and he had made his old sweetheart's little girl a present of a mechanical musical toy, a ship moving on the billows to the tunes of 'Home, Sweet Home,' and 'A Life on the Ocean Wave.' That was an event in the quiet village, and is remembered to this hour. So my friend, the pleasant landlord, has marks to go by, and, by Jove, sir ! he recalls that Michael Featherstone, being certain of the man by my description of him, stopped at his inn, in the private room upstairs, on the very day that Peter Lamb returned to the village to see his old mother, who wasn't above ground to welcome him. The landlord remembered a circumstance in connection with Michael Featherstone which fixed the whole thing. What circumstance ? Why, that going suddenly into the private room in which Featherstone was sitting, he finds his customer in a state of great agitation, caused by the loss of a paper which, as far as the landlord could understand, he was reading by the window, when a gust of wind blew it out of his hand. Not difficult, by any means, to put the puzzle together. He was reading James Whitelock's Confession ; by an accident the wind carried it away to the churchyard in which Peter Lamb was kneeling by his mother's grave ; and Peter Lamb picks it up, thinking nothing of it at the time. It lies in a nut-shell, as I have no doubt many another mystery does."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A DELICATE AND DIFFICULT TASK.

HAVING proceeded thus far, the detective paused for a moment or two to observe Philip Raven; he fixed his eyes upon the student with a serious air, and Philip Raven felt that something of importance had yet to be disclosed.

"I am considering, sir," he said, "how far you would go to serve those in whom you are so deeply interested."

"Do you mean the Earnshaws?" inquired Philip Raven.

"Yes," replied the detective.

"You could set me no task," said Philip Raven, "however difficult, which I would not gladly strive to perform to serve them."

"It is really," said the detective, with an approving nod, "not so much to tell you the story you have just heard as to open up another matter that I have ventured here to-day. If I am not mistaken, your earnest desire is to keep Mrs. Earnshaw and her family as much as possible clear of this tangled web."

"You are not mistaken. It is my most earnest desire."

"When I inform you, then, that the officer who, out of rivalry or jealousy, has taken up the Featherstone affair, has made up his mind to visit Mrs. Earnshaw and worry her in the hope of getting something out of her, what will you say?"

"Say!" cried Philip Raven in great excitement; "why, that at all hazards his visit must be prevented."

"My own idea. There is only one way to prevent it, and only one man to give him checkmate in that direction."

"Am I that man?"

"You are."

"And the way?"

"They must be got out of this neighbourhood without delay—this very afternoon, I should say. You can easily invent some excuse for the removal."

"It *must* be an invention," said Philip Raven, thoughtfully. "The truth would be almost a death stroke to them."

"That part of the affair I must leave to you, sir. With them out of the way, too, I should feel easier in my mind, for I'll not disguise from you that the discoveries I have made have won my sympathies for them."

"If you knew them as I know them," said Philip Raven warmly, "they would win your admiration as well. But, watched as I am, how shall I be able to carry out our design? It seems as if I cannot move a step without its becoming known to those who are working against us."

"I have provided for that. At this present moment the man who is set to watch my movements is following a counterfeit of me, made up so skilfully as to defy detection. My confederate is a tolerably decent actor, and imitates certain peculiarities of mine in the walking line sufficiently well for the purpose. He is leading my man a pretty dance, and I propose to lead yours a prettier. In plainer words, I will become your counterfeit, and draw off my gentleman on the other side of the road. We are obliged to play this game of cross-purposes sometimes in our business, and the detective who is setting himself against me in this Featherstone affair has set my back up, in a manner of speaking. He wants to snatch the game out of my hands, and I don't intend he shall succeed. If anybody is to reap credit for unravelling this tangled skein, Edwin Bousfield's the man. You and I, sir, are about the same height, and all I shall want you to do is to lend me the clothes you have on, and wear mine, or another suit. There's a difference in our faces, to be sure, and in the arrangement of our hair. I've provided for that. What do you think of this wig, sir? It's so like your poll that your own mother wouldn't know the difference. Do you catch the sense of my plan, sir? *I* go out of this house, disguised as you; *you* remain in it, in your own proper person. In ten minutes the field is clear; the man who is watching *you* follows *me*, hugging himself with satisfaction at the prospect of a discovery. For into my movement I throw a certain secrecy, as though I am engaged on an important errand. I look cautiously round, to make sure I am not watched. He laughs in his sleeve. 'Ha! ha!' says the simple fox; 'he doesn't know *I* am on his track.' I make a point of hiding my face; he laughs the longer; and so we go off, I first, he following me, on a four hours' spin, and after visiting two or three places to give him something to chew on,

I return to your lodgings, to find you gone. He resumes his watch, and being presently relieved by a mate, posts off to his chief to make his report; and I hope his chief will like it. I shall ask you to give me the key of your door, sir, and to make me free of your rooms. I will not abuse your confidence; your private belongings are quite safe in my hands. And to-night, when you and your friends are in the country, you send a telegram addressed to yourself, which will naturally be delivered to me, as your representative. In the telegram, you will take any name you fancy, or it's best to settle it, to prevent the possibility of mistakes. Put down on paper, sir, the name of Jack Martin, and let the telegram run in this way. 'From Jack Martin,' with your full address in the country (that is what I want the telegram for, to know where you are, so that I may communicate with you) 'to Philip Raven,' at this address: 'Baby is better, and out of danger.' That astonished look on your face tickles me. The message, sir, is a blind, in case it should go wrong, which isn't very likely; but a good general never throws away a chance. I shall understand, when I receive it, that you are all safe and comfortable; and if a different message comes in its place I shall understand that something is wrong, which you will explain in a letter. Is all this clear to you, sir?"

"Quite clear, but I am not easy as to your representation of me. The landlady may bring up the message to you, and she will perceive the difference in our voices. She is conversationally inclined, and is sometimes difficult to get rid of."

"Don't let that trouble you, sir. I am a first-rate mimic, and I have already learnt the tricks of your voice. Why, sir, I think I can almost deceive you with an imitation of yourself." And, in effect, the detective spoke these last words with so perfect an imitation of Philip Raven's tones, that the student was startled. "Are you satisfied on that point, sir?"

"Perfectly. There is another point which perplexes me. The summons is so sudden, that I scarcely know where to take the Earnshaws. You wish them to remove into the country, at some distance from this neighbourhood."

"I wish you to take them out of London altogether. When I went to Cobham I walked to Gravesend, there and back. Midway, about two miles from either place, stands an old-fashioned cottage in its own grounds, which in the summer

must be one of the pleasantest residences in all England, and in winter is not to be sneezed at. An old woman and her two daughters live there, and they would be delighted to take your party as lodgers. To tell you the truth, they are friends of mine, and a line from me would be sufficient."

"You forget nothing," said Philip Raven in admiration.

"Management, sir, management," said the detective complacently, "and a little forethought. There are half-a-dozen trains from Charing Cross to Gravesend this afternoon and evening, and from Gravesend you take a fly, which rolls you to the cottage door in twenty minutes or so. When your party are snug, back you walk to Gravesend and send your telegram. You look pale and anxious yourself, sir; the change will do you good."

"I am ready," said Philip Raven.

"Don't rise yet. I have plans which there is no time to go into with you, and in which, indeed, you can only assist me by following out the instructions I have given you. I want you, as briefly as you can, to tell me all that passed between you and Warren Earnshaw when you were a lad at school there, and he the schoolmaster. Lack of this information may spoil what I have in view; so don't keep anything back."

Briefly Philip Raven gave the detective the information he required; and then, in compliance with a further request, related all that had passed between him and Paul Cumberland within the last few days. No reference was made either by him or the detective to any connection which existed in their minds between Paul Cumberland and Warren Earnshaw. A tacit understanding had been arrived at that the subject was not to be spoken of until an absolute necessity arose; and of that necessity, and of the proper time to compare their suspicions, the detective was to be the judge.

"And now, sir," said the detective, when Philip Raven had concluded, "we will proceed to the serious part of our business. Get up, and move about, going to the window occasionally, so that our friend outside may suspect you are going for a walk, and may prepare himself to follow you. That's right, sir; off with your coat; you're doing exactly as I wish you. Now go into your bedroom, and change your clothes as quickly as possible, and leave the room free for me. Be careful, sir, when I leave the room, not to show yourself at the window for

full ten minutes ; you won't find your man there when you do ; and when you go out of the house yourself, choose a time when there's nobody on the stairs and in the passage, for if any person happened to see two Philip Ravens hop downstairs one after another, he might think the house was haunted, and give the alarm. Bravo, sir !" exclaimed the detective, as Philip Raven came out of his bedroom in another suit of clothes ; " I couldn't have done it quicker myself. Now I'll take the liberty of transforming myself. There's no harm in your going to the window in your shirt-sleeves, and showing yourself. Your clothes fit me to a T ; in a minute or two, sir, I'll show you your second self."

And, indeed, when the detective presently came out of the bedroom, Philip Raven was amazed at the likeness. It was almost impossible for one who was not very familiar with him to detect the imposture at first sight.

" These are some of the tricks of the trade, sir ; a detective who is not up to this sort of thing must take a back seat. More than one actor has taken a lesson from yours truly. I am ready, sir ; are you ? "

" Yes."

" Come away from the window, then." Philip Raven stepped to the side of the detective, at the other end of the room. " Is there anything you would like to say to me before I go ? "

" Nothing that occurs to me just now. I am a little flurried."

" You will cool down when I'm gone. Let me impress upon you the importance of carrying out my instructions to the letter. After I receive your telegram—which I should do certainly before ten o'clock to-night—I will write to you, so that you may be sure of a letter some time to-morrow. Do not move from the country till I instruct you ; there is no fear of your being discovered if you do as I have told you. And take this bit of comfort with you—that I have the greatest confidence in bringing this mystery to a satisfactory ending. There's work being done for me at this present moment in Featherstone Buildings which may bear good fruit. I've nothing more to say except good-day."

" Good-day."

Philip Raven took out his watch and noted the time. The ten minutes of inaction that the detective had imposed upon

him were more like ten hours, so fretful and impatient was he. When they had passed he went to the window. The man who had been watching him was gone, following his second self. The coast was clear for him to act. He left the house unobserved, and proceeded straight to the lodgings of the Earnshaws.

CHAPTER XL.

FROM EDWIN BOUSFIELD TO PHILIP RAVEN.

“DEAR SIR,

“I have to report progress. It is the exact word. I have not been standing still, nor has the Featherstone tragedy stood still. It has made an important move. In which direction? In yours—and in mine, as your agent. I am proud to say it has come about because of certain steps I took. If you hadn't engaged me, things, instead of looking very much brighter, would have looked as black as possible; so black, indeed, that I was glad to get you out of the way of them. For, after all, it was a mere chance—at least, a thousand to one against us, I should say—but I wouldn't let it slip, hopeless as it seemed. The fact is, sir, a crisis was about to occur which could not have been kept from the ears of Mrs. Earnshaw and her family; and what they would have heard—which now they will have no chance of hearing, thanks to you and me—would have been nothing less than black death to them.

“In the few lines I wrote to you last night I acknowledged the receipt of your telegram. This evening your letter came, and I am glad that you like your new quarters. You say you are impatient and feverish for news. Of course you are. And you shall have news—good news, sir.

“I will not take up your time by giving you an account of the dance I led that officer who was set to watch you. I never enjoyed anything more in my life; but I can't expect you to enter into my feelings, because you are so taken up by feelings of your own. Natural enough. I am the last man in the world to blame you.

“Without further palaver I will give you as straight an account as I can of what I have done and what I have discovered. More than once I have spoken to you about this Featherstone tragedy as being the strangest and most extraordinary case in my experience. It has kept up its character to the end. It *is* the most extraordinary case in my experience.

"As you know, I returned to your lodgings last night at about eight o'clock. I did not intend to keep away so long, but I could not resist the enjoyment of it. The officer returned also, and took up his station opposite your window till he was relieved. He has been there all day, and I have just let him see enough of me to satisfy him that I am at home. I have copied your ways exactly ; and he has not the slightest suspicion that I am not you. Neither has your landlady any suspicion. She cooked a chop for me, and came into the room. I was so busy writing that I did not look her full in the face—though tempted to do so, but I would not run the risk—but I kept up a conversation with her, and she had not the slightest suspicion. At eleven o'clock last night one of my men came up to make his report. He is my confidential officer, and he knows all that was about to take place between you and me. His report bore upon the case, but I need not just now refer to it. What he had done and what he had to do will come in their regular order.

"The crisis that was about to occur was this—and it would undoubtedly have occurred had you not spirited Mrs. Earnshaw and her family away into the country. The rival detective—who wished to snatch my chestnuts out of the fire and enjoy them—had his suspicions that Paul Cumberland was no less a man than Warren Earnshaw come to life, and he had laid his plans for a bold stroke. Violent hands were to be laid upon Paul Cumberland, and he was to be told that he was under arrest for the murder of Michael Featherstone. He was to be taken to the Earnshaws, and confronted with them. The boldness and suddenness of this move would have ensured its success. The man would have been recognised by Mrs. Earnshaw and the old man, and, as I have said, it would have been black death to them. You and I, between us, have prevented this from occurring, and have mated my rival. But checkmate was necessary, and I hold it in my hands. Yes, sir, no clearer checkmate was ever given.

"My rival, discovering that the Earnshaws had been spirited away, was nonplussed for the time, and delayed the intended arrest of Paul Cumberland. He is puzzled, too, at my disappearance. He will pull a long face when I compell him to confess that he is no match for Edwin Bousfield.

"Now, sir, I will let you into my secret. It was known, on

the night that Michael Featherstone was found dead in his rooms, that he must have had a large sum of money either about him or stolen from him. It has never been traced. What conclusion, then, to arrive at? That Michael Featherstone had some hiding-place for his money, and that he had hidden it on this night. Where would his hiding-place be? Somewhere in the house in which he lived—most likely in the very rooms he occupied. He was known as a secretive man, who never let his left hand know what his right hand was about to do. What I thought probable was, that if this money could be found, there might be found some documents in Michael Featherstone's own handwriting which would have a bearing upon the Earnshaws, and would bear in their favour. Follow out the line of argument I am about to set down.

"There is not the shadow of a doubt that Warren Earnshaw and his father were in Michael Featherstone's rooms at between ten and twelve o'clock on the night of his death. Now, if it could be proved that Michael Featherstone secreted his money *after* their visit, it would clear them of the suspicion of foul play which rested on them. The gates were locked at midnight, and no person could have climbed over them without injury to himself, or without being observed, between the time they were closed and the time in the morning they were opened by the gatekeeper—especially no old person. You will see presently why I put that in. The top of the gate was guarded by sharp spikes. Prove, therefore, that Michael Featherstone met his death between midnight and daylight and the Earnshaws are safe. This proof would be supplied if it could be brought in evidence that Michael Featherstone did something which no dead man could do within that time. So far, good.

"Supposing such proof to be in existence, how to obtain possession of it? Here comes in my cunning.

"Featherstone Buildings were condemned, and were about to be pulled down. But bricks are worth something, let them be ever so old; and by Government order the shells of Featherstone Buildings were announced to be sold by public auction.

"I made a venture in a new line of business, and went into partnership with a friend of mine, a builder who speculates in odd lots, and he and I together bought the old bricks of the house in which the "Tragedy of Featherstone" occurred.

"To cut a long story short, the walls were pulled down, my

confidential officer being on the watch ; and this very morning Michael Featherstone's hiding-place was found, and in that hiding-place a small iron safe. It was brought to me this afternoon, and in the presence of my partner, the builder, was opened in your room. We found in it over a thousand pounds in gold and notes, and a number of papers in Michael Featherstone's handwriting.

"Well, sir, I need not say that we were delighted and excited at this find, though we are uncertain whether we can lawfully lay claim to it. We are going to try, you may be sure. But, excited and delighted as I was at the discovery of the money, I give you my honest word that I was as equally pleased at the discovery of the papers, for at the very top of them was a book in which Michael Featherstone was in the habit of making what I call personal remarks, and, what is more fortunate, was in the habit of putting the dates to these remarks.

"Now, sir, when I tell you that the last of these entries was made by Michael Featherstone *after* the visit of the Earnshaws, father and son, on that fatal night, you will admit that in my own special line of business I am hard to beat.

"Sir, that entry is an effectual and complete proof of Warren Earnshaw's innocence, and affords at the same time a clue to the cause of Michael Featherstone's death. For your satisfaction I will copy here the whole of this particular entry, and at a more convenient time I will give you the book itself, so that you may be in actual possession of testimony upon which I know you set a great value :

CHAPTER XLI.

AN EXTRACT FROM MICHAEL FEATHERSTONE'S PRIVATE BOOK.

“‘WARREN EARNSHAW and that old fool his father paid me a visit to-night. The father came first, and treated me to a long account of the dreadful state of poverty he and his son were in. Serve them right. When that proud upstart Warren Earnshaw is in the workhouse I will go and see him, and give him a bit more of my mind. To the last hour of his life he shall smart for the insolence with which he has treated me. When he struck me and called me a gaol-bird, and told me that my proper place was the hulks, he little dreamt that the time would come when he would be ready to go on his knees to me to save him from starvation. I will bring him to that.

“‘But the old man was very humble at first, I must say. He has a bee in his bonnet, and he came to ask me how I had grown so rich, and whether I would not put him in the way of making money. I played with him, and led him on till I got out of him a full account of the state of privation they were in. Almost without food at times. I am glad to know it. Then he brought up his own goodness to me in rescuing me from the gutters. Had he been a little more choice in his words I might have given him a few shillings; as it was, I told him to go and hang himself.

“‘In the middle of it all up came Mr. Warren Earnshaw, who, beggar as he is, found fault with his father for appealing to me. I gave him my mind plainly, and he dared to tell me to my face that he believed I was no better than a thief, and that it was his conviction I had fattened upon the money I had stolen from his father when I was in the old man's service. I pumped him to see whether he had any suspicion that I had got hold of the money, for the embezzling of which his father was turned from the bank a disgraced man; but neither he nor his father had any suspicion of it. Being quite satisfied in my mind on this point, I did not spare either of them. It will be a long time before they forget their visit to me.

“Up to a certain point the old man was humbleness itself, but when he heard that I was the cause of Warren Earnshaw's being turned out of his situation, and that while I lived I would hunt him out of every other—as I will!—he changed his tune, and became abusive, telling me that he would make me repent my threats. The old fool! I shall find a way to make him eat his words. I sent them out of my room flying, and I told them if ever they set foot in it again I would have them marched off to prison. I never saw the old man in such a state of passion; he was whiter in the face than his young cub, Warren.

“Their visit has stirred me up. A little while before the old man came in I was seized with one of my strange attacks of dizziness, and I felt as if I was about to suffocate. My throat swelled almost to bursting, and I had just torn my shirt open at the neck for relief when he entered. The same sensation is coming over me now. My blood is surging up to my head. I will see a doctor about it. Last night I had a fit, which must have lasted at least a couple of hours. If I have many more like it I shall begin to be frightened for myself. But money (I hate to spend it on doctors) will set me all right. I will put my money and papers in my hiding-place; it is safer than the strongest safe, and I defy the cunningest thief to find it out. I must do it at once, for things are beginning to swim round me, and if I have occasion to summon assistance I should be sure to be robbed. Perhaps I want rest and country air. I will take it when I have money enough.”

CHAPTER XLII.

EDWIN BOUSFIELD CONTINUES HIS LETTER TO PHILIP RAVEN.

"WHAT do you make of this, sir? I will tell you what I make of it. After Michael Featherstone had deposited his money and his private book in his hiding-place, the fit in which he died came upon him. Whether he called for assistance or not will never be known. He died suffocated. This brings to my mind the lack of evidence of an attack by another person, or a struggle with another. We took things too much for granted. I have not the slightest doubt now as to the real cause of Featherstone's death, and I would undertake to prove it upon doctor's evidence if his death had occurred yesterday, or last week, instead of so many years ago. I remember well that there was really nothing that pointed conclusively to a death by violence. There were marks on his throat, but these must have been caused by himself in his struggles for breath, and in his death-agonies. I confess myself wrong in the suspicion I entertained. Warren Earnshaw is as innocent as an unborn babe, and the proofs are in my possession. I hope you are satisfied, sir?

"But there was still something that puzzled me mightily, and I was debating with myself how I could clear it up to my own satisfaction when the opportunity offered itself. The point was this. When Warren Earnshaw and the old man left Michael Featherstone, the man was alive. There had been a quarrel certainly, but there is nothing criminal in that. Why, then, when Warren Earnshaw heard of the death the next day, when it was given out in the papers that a murder had been committed, did he not come forward and say what he knew about it? Instead of doing so, he took to flight, which I still maintain is not the act of an innocent man. He must have had a strong reason for it, and I felt that I would give a good deal to get at the heart of this part of the mystery. I got at the heart of it without much trouble; he himself put me in the way of it.

“Yes, sir, we need not beat about the bush any longer ; I know for a certainty, and you very strongly suspect, that Paul Cumberland and Warren Earnshaw are one and the same person, and that the story of his death was a fiction which favoured his design. Some person was drowned, to be sure, and Warren Earnshaw, wishing it to be supposed that he had made away with himself—though never supposing that a body would be found—happened to place his clothes on the banks of the river in which the unknown man was discovered. So far fortune favoured him, and I have no doubt he was considerably astonished at the discovery when he read it in the papers. From that time forward he was dead to the world. He worked his passage out to Australia, where ill-luck pursued and dogged him. Had he been successful in making money, it was as much as his life was worth to communicate with his wife ; he was shrewd enough to suspect that a watch would be kept upon her, and that she could not receive money and letters from abroad without its becoming known. So sure as he was alive and not dead, so sure would he have been arrested and brought back to England on the capital charge. But what would that have mattered to an innocent man ?

“Sir, I was puzzling over this, and was not within miles of Warren Earnshaw’s motive for wishing it to be believed, even by those who were so dear to him, that he was dead, when a knock came at the door. You will bear in mind that I was personating you, that I was wearing your clothes, and that I astonished you considerably when I imitated your voice. If I could deceive you, I could deceive others, and when in your voice I called out ‘Come in,’ and Paul Cumberland made his appearance, my mind was instantly made up what course to pursue. It was dusk, and by good fortune I had not lit a candle, for if I had done so I should have had to find some excuse for extinguishing it.

“He was in a terrible state of agitation ; white and trembling ; he could scarcely get his words out. I felt a great pity for him, knowing what I knew ; and yet I was determined to wring his secret from him before I acquainted him with the happiness in store for him. I will make no attempt to reproduce, word for word, the conversation that ensued ; I should make a bungle of it, and it would occupy me too long ; I will, therefore, narrate in my own way what occurred, and I will be as conveniently brief as it is in my power to be.

“Well, sir, his agitation was caused by the sudden disappearance of his wife and family. He had been to their lodgings, and had learnt that they had been taken away yesterday. Taken away by whom? By Philip Raven. He was not given clearly to understand this, but from the inquiries he had made he jumped at a clue—which happened to be the right one. Well, then, he had come to Philip Raven to know where they were, and for what reason they had so unexpectedly left the neighbourhood.

“I played my part well; I did not let him have all the talk to himself; I spoke frequently, and he had not the slightest suspicion that I was not you. This set me at my ease, and when he had arrived at what I considered a favourable point, I calmly put the following questions to him: Why did he, a stranger, Paul Cumberland by name, take such an interest in the Earnshaws, and by what right did he come to question me as to their movements? He was silent at this, and I told him that his silence was suspicious, and that, unless he satisfied me, I would have nothing more to say to him.

“‘Come now,’ I said, ‘if it will be any encouragement to you to open your mind freely to me, I will tell you that they have been taken away secretly to prevent a great misfortune happening to them. The Featherstone tragedy is not forgotten. It is likely to be revived, and persons are being watched in connection with it; a watch is about to be set on the Earnshaws, and an official visit is about to be paid to them. Questions of such a nature will, in the event of that official visit, be put to Mrs. Earnshaw as will be likely to upset her reason. I am their only friend, and it is for their good that I have run a risk, and I am ready to run a greater risk to serve them, or any of their name.’ I looked at him keenly through the dusk as I repeated in a significant tone ‘Or any of their name. Trust in me, confide in me, and you will have cause to be thankful for it all the days of your life. It is not only yourself you will serve; it is Mrs. Earnshaw and her children, and Warren Earnshaw’s father, that you will serve much more than yourself. Perhaps I know more about you than you suspect, but it is for you to make the disclosures that may bring happiness to them.’

“I said a lot more than this, you may be sure, and I touched him very close; I had him in the room with me, and I was

determined he should make a clean breast of it. I led him on artfully—and for his own good, you will admit—until I had wormed the entire secret out of him. He confessed that he was Warren Earnshaw, and the tears rolled down his face when I offered him my hand. He spoke of you, sir, in a way that would have moved your heart. He made me feel bad as I listened to his humble tones; they were more than humble, they were heart-broken, and I have seldom in my life felt better pleased than I did in the knowledge that I had evidence in my possession which was going, for good and all, to clear away the dark clouds which had hung so long over his life and over the lives of those so dear to him.

“Now, sir, listen to the confession I wrung from him. It was given to me under the seal of confidence—I would have promised him anything, with the full intention of breaking my promises, so eager was I to get at the heart of his mystery, and so confident that the sun would soon shine brightly upon him and his. It would be doing him an injustice if I did not inform you that it was only upon my solemn promise that it should never go beyond me that he opened out to my view a strange page in his life. He is a man, sir, every inch of him—a true man, and he loves you. You may be proud of his friendship. He is capable of sacrifices—he has proved it—which few men would have the courage for. Here is his confession.

“On the night of Michael Featherstone’s death, Warren Earnshaw, who had been out looking for work, returned home unsuccessful at a little past ten o’clock. Inquiring for his father, his wife informed him that he had gone out, and that she had supposed the old man was with his son. Upon hearing this, Warren Earnshaw hurried from the house to seek his father. He was in a distressed state of mind. They were in great poverty, and Michael Featherstone was hunting them down. Old Mr. Earnshaw was not in his right senses, and had declared his intention many times to his son of seeking Michael Featherstone for the purpose of getting out of him how he had made his money. Warren had endeavoured to dissuade his father from carrying out this intention, but it was useless. ‘He shall let me know,’ the old man said; ‘I will tear the secret from him.’ Warren Earnshaw had a better knowledge than his father of the kind of man Michael Featherstone was,

and he was afraid that some violence would be done by one to the other if the two met. He suspected that his father had gone to Michael Featherstone's house, and he hastened to Featherstone Buildings, and found his suspicion confirmed : the old man was there. The scene, as described by Warren Earnshaw, fairly well confirms the statement set down in Michael Featherstone's private book ; but of course Warren Earnshaw's version is the truthful one. He and his father left Featherstone Buildings, and all Warren's efforts were directed to calming his father, who was in a frightful condition of mind. He could not calm the old man, and he heard from his father's lips the expression, many times repeated, of his determination to visit Michael Featherstone again, and drag from him an apology and a retraction of the threats he had used against his son. 'If he does not make reparation,' the old man said, 'he shall be bitterly punished for it.'

"Now, Warren Earnshaw had noticed, when he entered Michael Featherstone's apartment, that his enemy's shirt was torn open at the neck. He did not dare ask for an explanation, but he feared that the two men had already had a personal struggle. Up to this time, although his father's reason was gone, the madness had been harmless, but his great fear was that, under great agitation such as the old man was suffering from on that night, it might assume a dangerous form from which serious consequences would flow. He got his father home, and the old man went to bed. Warren did not tell his wife what had occurred ; she had sufficient troubles to contend with, and he was hourly reproaching himself for having dragged her into a state of poverty and privation. They also went to bed, and to sleep ; but at about two o'clock in the morning Warren Earnshaw awoke, and found that his father, at that strange hour, had secretly left the house. He did not know how long he had been absent. He dressed, and went immediately in search of him, and found the old man in the neighbourhood of Featherstone Buildings. He asked him where he had been, but he could get no information from him. All that the old man said, in different forms of speech, was that he had had a dream, and that all their troubles were at an end. In these mutterings the name of Michael Featherstone was frequently mentioned in a manner which alarmed Warren Earnshaw, and when, on the next day, he heard of the murder, as it

was falsely assumed to be by myself and others, he was agonized by the conviction that his father had obtained entrance into Michael Featherstone's rooms after midnight, and in a paroxysm of madness, had strangled him. He carried out this fatal belief in his mind to its dreadful end. If his father were accused of the crime, he himself would have to give evidence against him. He could see no escape for his father, no escape but one, and that was so to act as to direct suspicion against himself, and in this way to save his father. How he carried out this idea we know well. Warren Earnshaw voluntarily severed all the ties that bound him to life, to love, to honour, and became lost to the world.

"Further explanation is not required. It was a great and most wonderful sacrifice, and the man who proved himself capable of it is nothing less than a hero and a martyr. Why, sir, it set my blood aglow to hear it from his own lips. It was a scene I shall never forget.

"Well, sir, he passed his miserable life, under a false name, at the other end of the world. But a time came when he could no longer bear the exile to which he had doomed himself.

"'I will look once more upon the face of my wife, if she be alive, and then I shall be content to die.'

"His own words, sir.

"There it is, all told.

"Then came my turn. He was sitting in a chair, his face hidden in his hands; the tears were oozing through his fingers. A pitiful, beautiful sight! The tears came into my eyes, sir, and I am not ashamed to say it, though I would not say it to everybody; it would be the ruin of me. However, I was soon cool and collected. There was serious and delicate work before me.

"I asked him if he could bear a great shock. His hands dropped from his face, and he looked at me wildly. A great shock of joy, I added. He did not understand me, poor fellow! He had bidden good-bye to joy long ago.

"'I want you particularly to understand,' I said, 'that whatever occurs within the next few minutes, it means nothing but happiness to you and your good wife and children.'

"He started to his feet. 'Your voice is changed!' he cried.

"I had purposely changed it, and used my own.

"'Yes,' I said, 'my voice is changed, and I am not the

gentleman you thought I was. But, don't forget, it means nothing but happiness to you and everybody you love. If ever a man in a desperate strait had a friend, you, being that man, have got that friend in me.'

"He waited. It is my impression that he was striving to nerve himself for a last and fatal blow.

"I lit a candle, and stood before him. He had seen my face before, and he recognised me.

"Great God !' he exclaimed, 'I have ruined my father !'

"No,' I said, 'you have saved him, and have saved yourself !'

"Then, sir, by degrees, I told him all. I showed him Whitelock's Confession ; I showed him Michael Featherstone's private book ; I told him that you, his friend, were in the country with his wife and children ; I undertook to clear his name and to prove that he and all belonging to him were innocent, suffering victims of villainy. Yes, sir, I said all that and a lot more, and I have an idea that I was getting into a tangle and beginning to lose myself. Well, was it not enough to make even me forget myself when I saw that man drop on his knees and clasp his hands over his face ?

"I draw the curtain down just here, sir. I've got a man's heart inside me, and the commission I undertook from you has done me good.

"I was almost forgetting to tell you that he cleared up about the portrait of himself which I looked for in the album and could not find. It was the only portrait of him there was, and he himself took it out from the book, without his wife's knowledge. It fixed suspicion more firmly upon himself, and that was his intention. He knew, too, that if it got into the hands of the police, they would have had his portrait all over the country, and that might have been fatal.

"He wanted to come to you at once ; he begged me to tell him where you all are, but it wouldn't do ; he was fairly exhausted, and quite worn out, though he wouldn't own to it. It never would have done for him to present himself, in his condition, suddenly to his wife ; it might have been her death. So you will get this letter first, and you will have time to smooth the way for the joy to come. I have promised him, if he is tractable, obedient, and patient—but the cruelty of it, sir, to talk of patience to a man who has suffered as he has suffered—that he shall see his wife and children to-morrow evening. I

will bring him down myself, and I shall take the liberty of laying out a little money for you, so that he shall not appear otherwise than he is—a gentleman, if ever there was one. A gentleman and a man.

“He is asleep in your bed at this moment ; I have given it up to him ; he tried hard to keep awake. We had a bit of supper together, and he almost fell asleep over it ; nature was too much for him. When he wakes up he will wake up a new man.

“What will his feelings be? Upon my word, sir, there is something so solemn in all this that I am fairly overcome by it ; I have never had an experience like it, and shall never have another that can compare with it. Well, sir, I must wish you good-night, and I will go out and post this letter ; you will get it at about twelve o’clock, and we shall be with you at about five. You have got your work cut out for you.

“Your faithful servant,

“EDWIN BOUSFIELD.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

“IT IS FOR EVER SUMMER.”

ON a fine warm day in August a man with a wooden leg was making-believe to be very busy in an orchard attached to one of the prettiest cottages in all Kent. A monkey was assisting him in doing nothing, but there was a contemplative air about the brute creature which seemed to entitle him to the possession of the reflective faculty which his master, without dispute, possessed. Perhaps Barbery's mind (giving him the benefit of any doubt that may exist on the point) was fixed on feasts of nuts soon to be enjoyed in the woods beyond. Peter Lamb's mind, or a small bit of it, was on the abundant fruit trees; the greater part of his mind was on music, the sounds of which proceeded from the living-room of the cottage. A woman was sitting before a piano, playing softly. She was alone, and in her sightless eyes dwelt an expression of deep and sweet content. Presently she rose, and making her way to the door, stood within the porch, which was made beautiful by climbing roses. But the woman was the fairest picture.

Peter Lamb did not need to be called. He stumped quickly to her side.

“Do you see them?” she asked.

“No,” he replied, “they are not in sight.”

“But,” she said, with a smile, “if you turn the corner of the lane you will see them coming. I heard them, and I left off playing. Our Philippa is very happy.”

“Why can't she stop with us, then?” asked Peter Lamb, with a note of discontent in his voice.

“She has work elsewhere,” said Mary Earnshaw; “she is to be Philip's true helpmate when they are married. That is a woman's proper place, by her husband's side.”

“But slaving down there,” said Peter Lamb, “in the shums of London, won't be very bright to her.”

“It will be bright and beautiful, dear friend. Her husband's work is the highest a man can devote himself to. I am content.”

"Content to lose her. You, who loved her so!"

"I shall not lose her. She will come often here. I approve, with all my heart."

Peter Lamb gazed at her, and his discontent melted away. He had been heard to say that whenever he looked at Mary Earnshaw's face he thought of heaven.

"They are here," said Mary, and she moved a few steps forward.

They came into sight—Philippa and her lover, Philip Raven, to be married within a week. Warren Earnshaw followed them, talking to a gentleman.

"There is a stranger with them," said Mary.

Philippa left her lover and joined her mother, who kissed her, and then held up her face for Philip's kiss.

"Sir William Wentworth," said Philip, "who made me what I am, has come to shake hands with you, dear mother."

She stretched forth her hand, and Sir William Wentworth pressed it cordially.

"I am indeed happy to meet you," he said, "though I have known you long."

"Through Philip," she said.

"Yes, through Philip."

"We know you, too, through him. He never tires of speaking of your goodness to him."

"I happened to be born rich, madam," said Sir William Wentworth; "that is the extent of my goodness."

"Not so," said Mary gently; "money nobly used ennobles the possessor."

"Better to be born a worker, and to work like my friend Philip."

"It gladdens me to hear you speak in such terms of him; believe me, dear sir, we are all very grateful to you."

"I wrote to your son, Raymond, to come and see me in London. From what Philip hinted to me I judged that he was not very well placed in the situation he holds there. My secretary is leaving me, and I have an idea that Raymond would suit me. I proposed it to him, and he said if you approved—"

Mary's face flushed with delight.

"Ah, sir, how good you are! If you think he is fit for the duty."

"I am confident he is."

"You fill my heart with joy, sir. I remember, in years gone by, telling my husband"—her hand and Warren's were joined as she spoke, and their clasp tightened—"that there are light-houses along our lives, and that God knows when it is time to light the lamps. For me and for him, sir, the lamps are lighted. I am humbly, humbly grateful!"

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Later in the evening, Mary and Warren were sitting in the porch. The lovers were in sight. It was a holy and sacred hour.

"If our dear father were living," said Warren, "how happy he would be on this day, when all the hopes in which we used to indulge are ripening!"

"He is happy in the knowledge, my darling husband," said Mary, her face raised to heaven. "It is as if God had willed that he should live till the clouds which hovered over us had cleared away, and that then he should answer the call."

"You are happy, Mary?"

"Happy, my dear, my dearest! There lives no happier woman on earth. Kiss me, Warren. It is for ever summer in my life."

THE END.

APRIL, 1888.



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